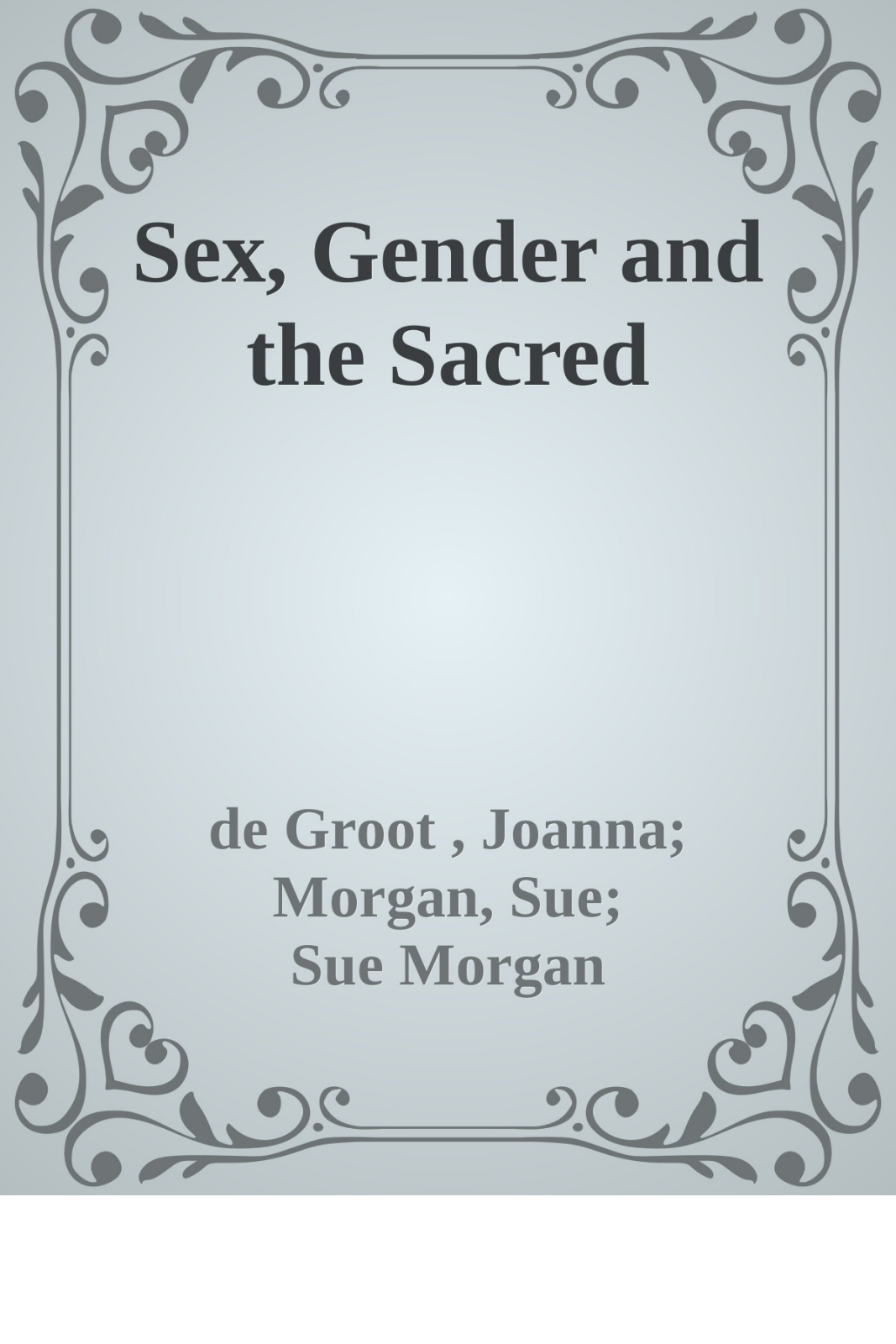


A decorative border with symmetrical floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark gray color, framing the central text.

Sex, Gender and the Sacred

**de Groot , Joanna;
Morgan, Sue;
Sue Morgan**

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Edited by
Joanna de Groot
and Sue Morgan



Sex, Gender *and the* Sacred

Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History

WILEY Blackwell

Gender and History Special Issue Book Series

Gender and History, an international, interdisciplinary journal on the history of femininity, masculinity, and gender relations, publishes annual special issues which are now available in book form. Bringing together path-breaking feminist scholarship with assessments of the field, each volume focuses on a specific subject, question or theme. These books are suitable for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in history, sociology, politics, cultural studies, and gender and women's studies.

Titles in the series include:

Sex, Gender and the Sacred: Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History

Edited by Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan

Gender History Across Epistemologies

Edited by Donna R. Gabaccia and Mary Jo Maynes

Gender and the City before Modernity

Edited by Lin Foxhall and Gabriele Neher

Historicising Gender and Sexuality

Edited by Kevin P. Murphy and Jennifer M. Spear

Homes and Homecomings: Gendered Histories of Domesticity and Return

Edited by K. H. Adler and Carrie Hamilton

Gender and Change: Agency, Chronology and Periodisation

Edited by Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker

Translating Feminisms in China

Edited by Dorothy Ko and Wang Zheng

Visual Genders, Visual Histories: A special Issue of Gender & History

Edited by Patricia Hayes

Violence, Vulnerability and Embodiment: Gender and History

Edited by Shani D'Cruze and Anupama Rao

Dialogues of Dispersal: Gender, Sexuality and African Diasporas

Edited by Sandra Gunning, Tera Hunter and Michele Mitchell

Material Strategies: Dress and Gender in Historical Perspective

Edited by Barbara Burman and Carole Turbin

Gender, Citizenships and Subjectivities

Edited by Kathleen Canning and Sonya Rose

Gendering the Middle Ages: A Gender and History Special Issue

Edited by Pauline Stafford and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker

Gender and History: Retrospect and Prospect

Edited by Leonore Davidoff, Keith McClelland and Eleni Varikas

Feminisms and Internationalism

Edited by Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy and Angela Woollacott

Gender and the Body in the Ancient Mediterranean

Edited by Maria Wyke

Gendered Colonialisms in African History

Edited by Nancy Rose Hunt, Tessie P. Liu and Jean Quataert

Sex, Gender and the Sacred

Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History

EDITED BY

JOANNA DE GROOT

AND

SUE MORGAN

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2014
Originally published as Volume 25, Issue 3 of *Gender & History*
© 2014 Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ,
United Kingdom

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

The rights of Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan to be identified as the authors of the editorial material in this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available for this book.

ISBN 9781118833766 (paperback)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Statuette of a Female Worshipper © R.M.N.-Grand Palais / Chezeville Brothers / Louvre Museum

Cover design by Nicki Averill Design & Illustration

CONTENTS

Notes on Contributors

Introduction: Beyond the 'Religious Turn'? Past, Present and Future Perspectives in Gender History

Past perspectives

Present perspectives

Crossing cultures, and transcultural exchanges

Religion, embodiment and subjectivity

Religion, gender and sexuality

Gender, religion and political activity

Future perspectives

Notes

Part I Crossing Cultures and Transnational Exchanges

1 Witches, Female Priests and Sacred Manoeuvres:

(De)Stabilising Gender and Sexuality in a Cuban Religion of African Origin

Ocha-Ifá: African roots, Cuban praxis

Witches, warlocks and the spectre of history

The Egbe Gèlèdè: contemporary manoeuvres in gender, sexuality and the sacred

'Women penetrate Ifá'

Conclusions

Notes

2 Liberal Religion and the 'Woman Question' between East and West: Perspectives from a Nineteenth-Century Bengali Women's Journal

Unitarian women activists as exemplars for Brahmo women

The 'new' Bengali woman and the spectre of the 'strong-minded' woman

Communications between Unitarian and Brahmo women

Liberal religion and the 'woman question' between east and west

Notes

3 Indeterminacy in Meaning: Religious Syncretism and Dynastic

Historiography in the *Shannüren zhuan*

The *Shannüren zhuan*

The editor

Religious syncretism

Literary form: structures and strictures

Formulaic narrative in the Pure Land women's biographies

Truncated narrative in the Chan women's biographies

Some critical remarks

Appendix I: two samples of Pure Land women's biographies

Appendix II: two samples of Chan women's biographies

Notes

4 'All of Their Customs are Daughters of Their Religion': Baptists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s–present

Scholarship

Protestant inroads in Oaxaca

Convención Bautista Nacional de México in Tlacoahuaya

La *Unión Femenil* and the new chapel

Protestantism and violence

Memory and martyrdom

Conclusion

Notes

5 Creating the 'Problem Hindu': *Sati*, Thuggee and Female Infanticide in India, 1800–60

'Of What Concerns Women': Hindu femininity and victimhood

'Execrable pride and selfishness': Hindu masculinity and violence

Conclusions

Notes

Part II Religion, Embodiment and Subjectivity

6 Engendering Purity and Impurity in Assyriological Studies: A Historiographical Overview

Starting point: feminist epistemologies as a theoretical framework

Gender studies and Assyriology: a relationship under construction

Purity and impurity in Mesopotamia: defining terms

Terminology of '(im)purity' in Assyriological studies: an assessment

Women and bodily products: blood and menstruation

A case study: (im)pure women in Mari

To conclude: gendered bodies and (im)purity

Notes

7 Lamentation Motifs in Medieval Hagiography

Literary inheritance

Tropes of maternal mourning

Weeping

Wailing

Violent gesticulation

Lamentation and the cult of saints

Lament motifs in late medieval saints' lives

Conclusion

Notes

8 Architecture of Desire: Mediating the Female Gaze in the Medieval English Anchorhold

Mechanics of medieval sight

The dangers of sight

Redeeming sight

Architecture of desire

Notes

9 The Alluring Beauty of a Leonardesque Ideal: Masculinity and Spirituality in Renaissance Milan

Youthful male beauty in Christian thought

Masculine beauty and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Milan

Youthful beauty in Leonardo's thought

Image and viewer

The issue of sexuality

Composite beauty and Leonardesque androgyny

Notes

10 'Deaf to the Word': Gender, Deafness and Protestantism in
Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland

Deaf 'heathens': the problem of the 'deaf and dumb'

Impious and impure: gendering irreligion

The deaf-mute's faith

Conclusion

Notes

Part III Religion, Gender and Sexuality

11 The Sexual Shame of the Chaste: 'Abortion Miracles' in
Early Medieval Saints' Lives

Early Irish hagiography

The Brigidine *vitae*

The *vitae* of Áed and Cainnech

The *vita* of Ciarán of Saigir

Complications: making the text disappear

The miraculous in the motif: gender and chastity

Conclusion

Notes

12 'Give Me Chastity': Masculinity and Attitudes to Chastity
and Celibacy in the Middle Ages

Conclusion

Notes

13 Common Soldiers, Same-Sex Love and Religion in the Early
Eighteenth-Century British Army

The autobiography of Sampson Staniforth

Military attitudes to sexuality and masculinity

Masculinity, religion and 'the unpardonable sin'

Methodism and Staniforth's story

Conclusions

Notes

14 'Dark Ecstasies': Sex, Mysticism and Psychology in Early
Twentieth-Century England

Notes

15 Made Flesh? Gender and Doctrine in Religious Violence in
Twentieth-Century Spain

Notes

Part IV Gender, Religion and Political Activity

16 Conversion Trouble: The Alawis of Hadhramawt, Empire, Gender and the Problem of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century South India

Sovereignty's global history

Global expansions, gender and religion

Resisting feudal futures

Immodest proposals: sovereignty, women's rights and the problem of conversion

Conclusion

Notes

17 '*Fatherland, Religion, Family*': Exploring the History of a Slogan in Greece, 1880–1930

Notes

18 The More Things Change: Debating Gender and Religion in India's Hindu Laws, 1920–2006

The early 1920s debates: British, colonial, civilising

Debates of the 1940s and 1950s: moment of transition

The 2006 debates: Indian, postcolonial, modernising

Conclusion

Notes

Index

End User License Agreement

List of Tables

Chapter 6

Table 1: Frequent Sumerian and Akkadian terms related to cleanliness

Chapter 18

Table 1: Hindu Code Bills in Parliament

List of Illustrations

Chapter 4

Figure 1: *El Atalaya Bautista*'s 1926 cover story on the Tlacochahuaya Church's inauguration.

Figure 2: Remains of the original Baptist Church of

Tlacochahuaya, Spring 2010. Photograph: © the author.

Figure 3: Aurora and Salomón Hernández Juárez holding a framed picture of Samuel Juárez García. Photograph: © the author.

Figure 4: Feast Day of St. Jerome, Tlacochahuaya, 30 September 2010. Photograph: © the author.

Chapter 8

Figure 1: Cruciform squint in St Nicholas's Church, Compton, Surrey.

Figure 2: Cruciform squint in St John the Baptist's Church, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Figure 3: Cruciform squint in St Mary of Charity Church, Faversham, Kent.

Figure 4: Painted pillar across from squint in St Mary of Charity's Church, Faversham, Kent.

Figure 5: Wall painting of St Catherine of Alexandria across from squint in St Botolph's Church, Hardham, Sussex.

Figure 6: The grave in St Anne's Church, Lewes, East Sussex.

Chapter 9

Figure 1: Marco d'Oggiono, The Young Christ, c.1490–95, Fundación Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid. (Attributed by the Fundación Lázaro Galdiano to Boltraffio.) By permission of Fundación Lázaro Galdiano. Madrid.

Figure 2: Studio of Leonardo da Vinci, St John the Baptist, c.1490–1510, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1937.102. By permission of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Figure 3: Marco d'Oggiono, Cristo benedicente, c.1490s, Galleria Borghese, Rome, inv 435. By kind permission of the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale della città di Roma.

Figure 4: A grotesque old man in profile, Leonardo da Vinci, c.1490–95, Royal Collection, Windsor, RL 12448. Supplied by Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2013.

Figure 5: Leonardo da Vinci, Heads of an old man and a youth, 1495, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. By permission of S.S.P.S.A.E and of the Polo Museale della città di Firenze, Gabinetto Fotografico.

Figure 6: Leonardo da Vinci, Heads in Profile, c.1478, Royal

Collection, Windsor, RL 12276v. Supplied by Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2013.

Figure 7: Leonardo da Vinci, John the Baptist, c.1508–1518, The Louvre Museum, Paris. © Photo RMN-GP Photographe Stéphane Maréchalle.

Figure 8: After Leonardo da Vinci, St. John the Baptist, c.1505–1507, Kunstmuseum, Basel. By permission of Kunstmuseum Basel. Bequest of Dr. Fritz Sarasin 1942. Photo credit: Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin P. Bühler.

Chapter 14

Figure 1: Suzanne Schleck. ‘Icon of Evelyn Underhill’. Egg tempera and gold leaf on wood. 11" × 14". (2000). Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Anne E. Bailey completed her doctorate in 2010 and currently holds a postdoctoral research fellowship at Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford. Her research interests include saints' cults and pilgrimage, hagiography, women's religious history and medical history, focusing chiefly on England during the High Middle Ages.

Esme Cleall is a Lecturer in the History of the British Empire at Sheffield University. Her recent book, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Difference in the British Empire*, analyses families, sickness and violence in a colonial context. She also works on disability in Britain and in the Empire.

Maya Corry is currently a Research Associate on the three-year ERC-funded project 'Domestic Devotions: The Place of Piety in the Renaissance Italian Home, 1400–1600', at the University of Cambridge. She completed her doctorate in the History of Art department at the University of Oxford, with a thesis titled 'Masculinity and Spirituality in Renaissance Milan: The Role of the Beautiful Body in the Art of Leonardo da Vinci and the Leonardeschi'. While at Oxford, she was a Graduate Teaching and Research Scholar at Oriel College and co-convened the annual Italian Renaissance seminar series.

Érica Couto-Ferreira is currently working on the project 'Medical Systems in Transition: The Case of the Ancient Near East' at the University of Heidelberg. Her main research interests include gynaecology and diseases of women in cuneiform texts, medical professions in antiquity, constitution and transmission of medical knowledge in the Ancient Near East, and lexicography of the body in Sumerian and Akkadian.

Pat Cullum is Head of History at the University of Huddersfield. She is the editor, with Katherine J. Lewis, of *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (2005). She has written widely on clerical masculinity, lay piety and hospitals and almshouses in late medieval England.

Joy Dixon is an Associate Professor of History at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. She is the author of *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (2001) and co-editor of 'Religion and Sexuality', a special issue of *Victorian Review* (2011). Her current project – tentatively titled 'Sexual Heresies: Religion, Science, and Sexuality in Britain, 1870–1930' – explores the impact of the new sexual sciences on religious life in Britain.

Susan Gane is a doctoral student researching the social history of the British

army, 1730–70. Her work is built around autobiographies of men who were common soldiers in this period.

Agnès Garcia-Ventura is a researcher involved in Assyriology and gender studies. Her thesis (at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona) combines both fields and deals with the organisation of work in the Ur III textile industry. She is also carrying out research into the historiography of Ancient Near Eastern studies in Spain during the twentieth century.

Effi Gazi is Associate Professor of Modern History and Theory of Historiography in the Social and Education Policy Department, University of the Peloponnese, Greece. She received her doctorate from the European University Institute, Florence in 1997 and conducted post-doctoral research at Princeton University. Her publications include *Scientific National History: The Greek Case in Comparative Perspective* (2000); *The Second Life of the Three Hierarchs: A Genealogy of the 'Helleno-Christian Civilization'* (in Greek, 2004) and *'Fatherland, Religion, Family': History of a Slogan (1880–1930)* (in Greek, 2011). Her research interests include the history and theory of historiography, intellectual and cultural history as well as the history of nationalism and the history of politics and religion.

Daniel J. R. Grey is Lecturer in World History Plymouth University, researching gender and violence in modern Britain and India. His book, *Degrees of Guilt: Infanticide in England 1860–1960*, is forthcoming with Liverpool University Press.

Joanna de Groot is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of York. She works on gender and sexual histories of imperialism and orientalism, and of social, cultural and political movements in Iran and Europe. She is currently researching a gendered study of nineteenth-century Iran.

Wilson Chacko Jacob is Associate Professor of History at Concordia University, Montreal. During 2012–13, he was a EURIAS Visiting Fellow at CRASSH and Clare Hall, Cambridge University. This article forms part of a larger SSHRC-funded research project: 'Sovereignty in Times of Empire: Islam, Gangsters, and Preachers'.

Yuet Keung Lo is an Associate Professor of Chinese Studies at the National University of Singapore. He specialises in Chinese intellectual history covering Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism and their interactions from the classical period to late imperial times. He has published a book and numerous articles in these areas, and his recent publications include 'The Drama of Numskulls: Structure, Texture, and Functions of the *Scripture of One Hundred Parables*', *Early Medieval China* 12 (2006); 'Conversion to Chastity: A Buddhist Catalyst in Early Imperial China', *Nan Nu* 10 (2008); 'Change Beyond Syncretism: Ouyi Zhixu's Buddhist Hermeneutics of the *Yijing*', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35 (2008) and 'From a Dual Soul to a Unitary Soul: The Babel of Soul Terminologies in Early China', *Monumenta*

Serica 56 (2008). He is currently completing two books on early medieval China; one on Buddhist storytelling and one on gendered virtues.

Kathleen M. McIntyre is an Assistant Professor of Latin American History at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. She received her doctorate from the University of New Mexico in 2012. She is currently revising her thesis, 'Contested Spaces: Protestantism in Oaxaca, 1919–95' for publication.

Clare Midgley is Research Professor in History at Sheffield Hallam University. She is the author of *Women Against Slavery* (1995), *Gender and Imperialism* (1998) and *Feminism and Empire* (2007) and is currently researching a monograph on 'Liberal Religion and the "Woman Question" in the Age of Empire'.

Zubin Mistry is currently preparing for publication a monograph on perceptions of abortion in the Early Middle Ages.

Sue Morgan is Professor of Women's and Gender History at the University of Chichester, UK. She writes on the history of gender, religion and sexuality in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and has edited *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900* (2002) and *The Feminist History Reader* (2006). She has also co-edited several collections including *Manifestos for History* (2007) with Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow; *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures: Britain, 1800–1940* (2010) with Jacqueline deVries and, most recently, *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain* (2013) with Lucy Delap. She is currently working on a history of religious discourses of love, sexuality and gender between 1880 and 1940.

Michelle M. Sauer is Professor of English and Gender Studies at the University of North Dakota. She specialises in Middle English language and literature, especially women's devotional literature, and publishes regularly on anchoritism, mysticism, asceticism, hagiography and Church history. Her recent books include *The Lesbian Premodern* (2011); *How to Write about Chaucer* (2009); *The Companion to Pre-1600 British Poetry* (2008) and a forthcoming volume, *Gender in Medieval Culture* (Continuum). Her current projects include an edition of the *Wooing Group*; an anchoritic guidebook; a collection on late medieval Carmelite Rules and several edited collections as well as articles and essays.

Mary Vincent teaches history at the University of Sheffield, where she is Professor of Modern European History. She is the author of various articles on gender, religion and politics in Republican and Civil War Spain and her most recent book is *Spain 1833–2002: People and State* (2007). She is currently working on a monograph of Franco's Crusade, looking at religious violence in the Spanish Civil War.

Carolyn E. Watson is Profesora Titular in the Escuela de Historia y Ciencias

Sociales y at the Universidad ARCIS in Santiago, Chile. Her research analyses the role of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality in the formation of national identity in twentieth-century Cuba.

Rina Verma Williams currently teaches in the Departments of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and of Political Science at the University of Cincinnati. She received her doctorate in Political Science from Harvard University. Her areas of specialisation include South Asian politics; women and gender; ethnicity and nationalism; religion and politics; and politics of the developing nations. Her first book, *Postcolonial Politics and Personal Laws: Colonial Legal Legacies and the Indian State*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2006. Her current research examines the role of women and gender in religious nationalism in Indian politics.

Introduction: Beyond the 'Religious Turn'? Past, Present and Future Perspectives in Gender History

Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan

In the twenty-fifth anniversary year of *Gender & History*, this special issue on religion provides an opportune moment for the review and reassessment of an aspect of gender history that has developed a substantial scholarship and witnessed important historiographical shifts both before and since the 1980s. As a capacious heuristic category, 'religion' stands in for a range of meanings historically, from the highly individuated interior experience of prayer and mysticism to the public corporate structures of institutional or national religious politics. As the various contributors to this volume illustrate, religious discourses can be expressed through private contemplation, worship rituals, sacred works of art, spiritual communities, associational networks and nationalist agendas. They have been appropriated performatively by women and men in the past as part of both individual identity formations and socio-political practices. In what ways, then, might an analysis of religion help us rethink the current frameworks and narratives of histories of gender and, conversely, how might a focus on gender and sexuality illuminate the past interactions of religion and culture? These questions framed a stimulating two-day international symposium held in September 2012 at the University of York from which this volume developed, where speakers debated the tenacious and creative power of religion in fashioning gendered selves across a wide geographical, spiritual and chronological spectrum. Spanning almost 4,000 years from the second millennium BCE to the twenty-first century, the interlocking narratives of religion and gender were scrutinised from ancient Mesopotamia to renaissance Milan, from Song China to post-revolutionary Mexico, from medieval Ireland to modern Spain and Cuba, and from early modern England to nineteenth-century India.

Several major themes emerged from the symposium and are enlarged upon here: that we live in a world which is both increasingly secular and increasingly religious, and that within this paradox issues concerning gender and sexuality constitute repeated points of crisis and rupture; that in a field committed to exploring relations of difference through gender, age, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation, gender history has not always accorded religious differences a similar analytical force, subsuming them within national, ethnic or other cultural identities; following on from this point – 'theology really

matters'. As the exposition of a given faith's encounter with, and revelation of, the divine (an essentially metaphysical experience), theology has often been collapsed by historians into its wider social and more visible counterpart, religion. Yet as Dominic Erdozain warns, the omission of theology reduces religion to little more than a reflection or determinant of culture. In neglecting theological heterogeneity, the material impact of differing doctrines and beliefs upon the lives of men and women is obscured.¹ For gender historians, this loss is particularly significant in understanding how hegemonies are made and maintained. As feminist theologians have demonstrated, symbolic and anthropomorphic images of the divine are saturated with gender constructs, often with important, if inconsistent implications for the temporal gender order. Patriarchy may have been well served, although sometimes subverted, by the Christian symbols of God the Father and Son, Eve and the Virgin Mary, but what were the lived gender effects of Hindu goddess cults such as that of Kali with its maternal and warrior-like representations of femininity, or Nahua deities of Central Mexico who transgressed gender binaries?²

Since its establishment, *Gender & History* has contributed regularly to the historiography of gender and religion through a wide range of articles. Among other subjects these have examined medieval convent spirituality, early modern Islamic conversion narratives, masculinity and priestly power in medieval Normandy and Florence, Jewish women in the Holocaust, Australian missionary masculinities and Aboriginal peoples, clerical marriage in the English and German reformations, diasporic West African spiritualities, Irish Catholic masculinity, Scottish missionaries and sexual misconduct, female Quaker ministries, and modern Italian and Argentinian Catholic women's organisations.³ A significant increase in articles centred on religion in the nineties and 'noughties' reflects a more general 'religious turn' in cultural history. Our introduction focuses upon past, present and future perspectives on the history of gender and religion, identifying some of the major tropes, narratives and turning-points to date, situating the volume's contents within some currently important themes in gender history and suggesting future potentialities for this burgeoning field.

Past perspectives

The earliest and most extensive historiographies of gender and religion over the last forty years have dealt with Christianity in its multiple forms. This literature, particularly in the anglophone world, has manifested interesting, albeit uneven developments shaped by diverse national contexts. In the USA, landmark articles such as Barbara Welter's 'The Cult of True Womanhood' (1966) and 'The Feminisation of American Religion, 1800–1860' (1974), led the way in identifying religion's formative contribution to one of the major organising tropes of women's history, 'separate spheres' ideology.⁴ Since then, an enormous literature on American women and religion has been

forthcoming which, as Catherine Brekus observes, ‘virtually defies categorization’. Numerous studies of the beliefs and practices of enslaved women, African American holiness preachers, Catholic, Protestant, Mormon and Jewish men and women in addition to Native American forms of spirituality have been produced, despite a relative decline in interest during the 1980s due to the rise of the Religious Right and its ultra-conservative gender and sexual politics.⁵ In Britain, the socialist-feminist focus of much early gender history often marginalised religion as of limited relevance for understanding women's economic and political disadvantages. Nonetheless, Barbara Taylor's work has acknowledged the interaction of religious with other intellectual and political influences in the writings and activism of Owenite feminists and Mary Wollstonecraft.⁶ As the early modern historian Patricia Crawford would later comment, the religious subject appeared unexciting – all too often ‘the godly woman was the successfully socialised woman’.⁷ However, in its iconic reading of the role of gender in the formation of the middle classes, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (1987) provided what remains one of the most nuanced readings of Victorian evangelicalism and its contradictory implications for hegemonic constructions of both femininity and masculinity.⁸ It modelled an approach with rich possibilities for those working on gender and religion in other contexts.

One of the dominant narratives to emerge in modern scholarship recounts the ‘feminisation of religion’, a multivalent thesis originating in work on American Protestantism focused on women's greater preponderance in religious and church life and the increasing cultural designation of women as the more pious sex. Despite numerous studies of this phenomenon in Europe, North America and Australia, the theory has received increasing criticism as an overly simplistic formula that disregards both free-thinking, secularist and atheist women – many of whom, like the atheist and broadcaster Margaret Knight, attracted considerable vilification – and devout men (discussed later in this introduction).⁹ The ‘feminisation of religion’ theory, it is argued, reinscribes gender binaries and essentialises the very categories that require historical interrogation. It is also quite religiously specific. In Judaism, for example, it was certainly the case that pioneering women such as Lily Montagu and Ray Frank engaged in quasi-theological forms of social and educational activities among their co-religionists, as shown by Jean Spence, Shari Rabin and Susan L. Tananbaum.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Anne Summers has argued that the feminisation theory remains ‘largely inapplicable’ to modern western Jewish communities where, with women excluded from the rabbinate until the 1970s, religious practice remained overwhelmingly male and women's responsibility for Sabbath observance was a largely domestic affair. Benjamin Baader's work on nineteenth-century Judaism and bourgeois culture in Germany, however, suggests a more complex picture.¹¹

A flourishing body of work on religion and women's historical agency, often using interpretative models such as 'women's culture' and 'female associational networks' in studies of family life, philanthropy, missionary activity, sisterhoods, preaching and social reform, suggests that the feminisation theory persists.¹² The extent to which female religious activism might be designated 'feminist' has also prompted long-standing and unresolved debate. Feminism could be nurtured by heterodox forms of spirituality such as theosophy, Christian Science or the Babi-Baha'i tradition, and by religious scepticism or secularism. Recent work on women and gender in the Buddhist, Jewish and Hindu traditions has similarly recuperated women's agency, opening up gendered analyses of beliefs, texts and practices, and exploring the issues of embodiment and sexuality which interest several authors in this special issue.¹³ Work by Padma Anagol, Patricia Grimshaw, Rhonda Semple and others shows that religiously derived feminisms were often the product of complex transnational and local circulations of ideas, and of religiously syncretic interactions between colonial missionary and indigenous women's discourses. Transcultural and trans-spatial approaches to gender and religion, approaches which appear in some of the articles published here, have informed discussions of cross-confessional encounters in the Iberian peninsula as well as in early modern colonial settings in the Americas.¹⁴ Jacqueline de Vries has shown how suffragists often appropriated religious tropes, symbols and rituals, while others note that critical issues of liberal reform or civil rights often transcended religious differences while including faith-specific features.¹⁵

Nonetheless, theoretical analyses of the causal relationship between mainstream religious traditions and feminism seem inconclusive, with historians acknowledging religion's ability to mobilise women while simultaneously critiquing its tendency to delimit the radicalism of feminist ideas. As Immaculada Blasco Herranz has commented in her study of female Spanish Catholic militancy, such approaches reveal 'a form of cultural ascent towards both a feminist consciousness and women's emancipation' of an essentially secular kind.¹⁶ The early modern historian Sarah Apetrei remains similarly unconvinced by readings of religion as a 'kind of implacable patriarchal intelligence' against which women engaged in various 'imaginative and intellectual gymnastics' seeking to circumvent its more oppressive traits. Religion, she reminds us, 'was not just the envelope for an unconsciously secular or self-serving agenda: it was the very origin and goal of feminism'.¹⁷ In her studies of seventeenth-century female visionaries and eighteenth-century Methodist radicals, Phyllis Mack argues that self-transcendence rather than self-advancement was their core spiritual aim. Carmen Mangion has similarly shown that women entering convents and sisterhoods were less interested in challenging the status quo than in pursuing a 'higher calling'. Conceptualising authority in terms of humility, and agency in terms of 'lack' (lack of status, autonomy or even gender, as Mack famously

phrases it) means that taking religion 'on its own terms' poses considerable conceptual challenges for feminist and gender historians.¹⁸

The recent global rise of new religious politics provides contemporary examples of women's support for so-called 'fundamentalist' movements with their frequently restrictive attitudes towards gender roles and sexuality. The instabilities created by environmental disasters, the failure of secular projects (whether nationalist, leftist or liberal), capitalism's global exploitation of the markets and labour, and the resulting poverty and destabilisation of family structures have provided opportunities for new forms of religiously inspired social and political action around faith-branded organisations. According to Martin Riesebrodt and Kelly H. Chong, this not only contends with other political forces at the level of state or community, but also acts as a means to access "higher powers" in order to prevent crises or cope with them when they have occurred'.¹⁹ Nor do religious 'fundamentalisms' necessarily negate female agency or interests in the views of adherents. As with right-wing movements of the interwar years, religious nationalisms are regarded by many women as providing greater protection and self-respect for their established familial roles, whether in the USA, Latin America, India or the Middle East.²⁰ Numerous studies of modern refigurations of 'Islamic' female dress codes have established how, for women who wish to study or work outside the home, they can provide protection from communal, patriarchal or familial criticism, and access to a degree of personal autonomy.²¹

The mobilisation of Iranian women in the anti-Shah movement of the late 1970s produced complex contradictions and intersections between the use of control over women as a flagship policy of the post-1979 'Islamic' regime, the expansion of educational opportunity and public visibility for women, and both dissenting Muslim and liberal women's critiques of the official version of Islam. Arguably it is the strongly patriarchal family forms and communal investment in ideas of reputation and respectability with their religious inflections which constrain women quite as much as regime policy, as is also the case in the different political and economic setting of Afghanistan.²² In the USA, family and sexuality also became core terrains for religious conservatives from the mid-1980s, and, as in South Korea, female participation in Christian church life became a welcome and acceptable form of relief from the restrictions of the patriarchal family structure. The literal and symbolic roles of the female body and sexuality have been ubiquitous, notably the stance of the US Christian right on abortion and homosexuality (the latter paralleled among evangelical Christians in Africa and various Muslim and Hindu groups). Powerful configurations of gender, religion and body politics have sustained contemporary reaffirmations and refiguring of conventions of body covering, genital cutting, or widow burning.²³

Hindu nationalism has involved female grassroots activism in India where Hindu women have mobilised against Muslim women.²⁴ Other religious

nationalisms in South Asia and the Middle East are inseparable from their anti-colonial origins and opposition to 'contaminating' western influences. Gendered rhetorics of religio-cultural authenticity entwine with invocations of scriptural tradition, but also with appropriations of the discourses of modernity. Thus Muslim and Hindu as well as Christian faith groups affirm the authority of established texts and practices while simultaneously asserting their conformability with 'modern' ideals of equity, opportunity and progress. In Iran, reformist Muslim intellectuals such as Ali Shari'ati attempted to align patriarchal gender prescriptions with a world in which articulate women staked modern claims to be heard; just as in Egypt the Muslim Brothers recognised spaces for autonomous activity by Muslim sisters. In Egypt and Iran, learned and pious women re-read sacred texts and challenged male-led claims to define 'right' versions of Islam. As with early modern European religious controversies, contests over the authoritative interpretation of texts and the ownership of that activity were powerfully inflected by gender politics.²⁵

Women's recurrent representation as distinctive repositories of piety in many belief systems has meant that histories of masculinity and religion have been slower to emerge, although medievalists have produced important work in this field.²⁶ As Yvonne Werner has noted, if religion was gendered female, then 'religion and modern masculinity...seemed incompatible'.²⁷ Much work remains to be done on religious masculinities, both lay and clerical, as well as on men's negotiations of the growing dissonances between secular and spiritual codes of manliness in modern times. Here, recourse to a rhetoric of paradox is tempting. Within the gendered power structures of institutional religion, men have exercised undeniable levels of power and privilege with adverse results for women's spiritual, social and professional equality. (Remarkably, women's struggle for religious leadership and the historicisation of various forms of reassertion by religious patriarchies remains an under-explored narrative within modern gender and religion.) Interestingly, confronted with dominant ideals of the competitive, promiscuous, rational and materialistic secular male subject within the wider culture, devout men have inhabited an increasingly precarious historical terrain. Nowhere has this cultural contradiction been more literally embodied than in the suspect, peripheral masculinity of the clergy or, as George Eliot described them, a third 'clerical' sex.²⁸ Anti-clericalist sentiment has emerged at various past moments of popular political agitation expressed in plebeian, liberal and anti-puritan critiques, often accompanied, as Hugh McLeod shows for nineteenth-century England, by masculinist anti-clerical rhetoric directed against flamboyant 'effeminate' Anglo- or Roman Catholic priesthoods. Comparable Protestant rhetorics were deployed in Germany and the UK against gaudy, 'feminised' Jews, whether prominent individuals like Disraeli or more generally Jewish migrants, 'white slave traders' or entrepreneurs.²⁹

The perception of religion as increasingly feminised, the churches' declining ability to appeal to men, and a resulting 'crisis model' of modern religious masculinity has attained the status of historiographical orthodoxy in the field. Scholars have shown that attempts to buttress a dwindling religiously oriented masculinity from the 1850s onwards by emphasising muscularity, militarism, sporting prowess or heroism were a global phenomenon. Studies of the unstable but dominant trope of 'muscular Christianity' have been undertaken in numerous national contexts including Sweden, France, Canada, Germany, Australia, Ireland, Belgium and Spain as well as the USA and UK, each illustrating various theological emphases and narratives of decline.³⁰ In addition the transnational expression of muscular Christianity through the central topos of sport shows how interconnections between colonial and metropolitan identities of religion and gender cannot be understood solely through unidirectional, imperialist notions of the effeminate Hindu or the aggressively martial Sikh.³¹ Instead, indigenous appropriations and a 'new logic of postcolonial hybridity' meant that Indians living under British colonial rule, or recipients of missionary activity in Japan, successfully de-Christianised and transformed the 'muscular Christian' ethic within new nationally and religiously specific formations such as muscular Hinduism or Japanese Bushido.³² Joseph Alter argues that the yoga renaissance led by men like Swami Vivekananda, so central to muscular Hinduism in the late nineteenth century, represented a transcultural effort to reconceive relations between the body, morality and spirituality and thus requires a global rather than simplistically colonial analytical framework.³³ Modern Buddhism, regarded by some as eminently appealing to men due to its reputation for rationalism, intellectualism and practical self-help, was similarly spiritually and ethnically multi-directional between South Asia, China, Europe and America.³⁴

Like muscular Christianity, muscular Judaism in central and western Europe and the USA also focused upon physical strength and moral virtue. Although a minority movement, Zionism 'constituted a significant means of displaying a new Jewish male type' counteracting anti-Semitic stereotypes of passive, weak, scholarly Jews through an actively heterosexual representation of Max Nordau's *muskelljudentum*.³⁵ For many migrant communities, the desire to minimise 'alienness' and encourage acculturation could result in conservative gender and sexual politics, as the work of Lara Marks, Rickie Burman and Paula Hyman illustrates.³⁶ Their studies of Jewish communities parallel work on migrant Hindus and Muslims. As a result, new formations of migrant and diasporic gender identities were under constant (re)construction, shot through with differing inter-generational tensions and theological positions.

Attention to religion can provide gender historians with new ideas about hegemonic male identities and their relationship with marginalised, subordinate and complicit masculinities. Historians of medieval Christianity

have contributed significantly to this process, exploring the emergence of Christianised masculinities, their intersections with pre- and non-Christian meanings and performances of ‘manliness’, and their complex links to expressions of sexuality.³⁷ According to Erin Bell, early Quaker men preached nonviolence, propounding a masculinity which challenged dominant early modern codes of aggressive male competition and authority, yet still maintained traditional gender power structures within the Quaker community. The way in which religious communities sought to secure their own theological identities through cultural differentiation while seeking wider social acceptance is similarly highlighted in Sara Patterson's discussion of Mormon masculinity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Here the legally required shift to monogamy necessitated new models of Mormon manhood marked by the dominant cultural virtues of business, patriotism and good citizenship rather than by polygamy.³⁸

Alex Shepard and Garthine Walker have observed that cultural historians’ preference for synchronic readings of the multiple meanings of masculinity or femininity has tended to forestall diachronic analyses of gender's role as a catalyst for historical change.³⁹ Several articles in this special issue interrogate conventional readings of historical periods such as the Renaissance, or map longer-term shifts in legislative attitudes to, and textual representations of, specific religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. However, the analysis of the role of gender in generating new periodisations of religion in the past has barely begun. Recent revisionist debates in religious history concerning the periodisation of secularisation and its complex relationship with modernity have received extensive attention, with Christianity's ‘cultural displacement’ relocated as late as the 1960s, a decade identified by arch-revisionist Callum Brown as witnessing the ‘death of Christian Britain’.⁴⁰ Most significantly, gender rather than class-based analysis is given a crucial role in this shift. ‘Gender’, Brown asserts, ‘is emerging as possibly the single most important definer of the timing and content of long-term change to the Christian religion of Europe’.⁴¹ It is interesting to compare the emergence of ‘postsecular’ perspectives (discussed later) which take interactive rather than oppositional views of secular and Christian thought and practice, with the historiography of Islam and gender which still struggles to move away from working within that binary.

Present perspectives

In the chapters which follow, the ‘cultural historical’ approach to the past is heavily, but not exclusively, in evidence, as authors explore the ambiguous discursive effects of religious behaviour and theological ideas on notions of gender and sexuality and the material contexts in which they were produced, normalised and resisted. Most contributors present religion as a prism through which men and women, individually and collectively, experienced a range of

political, theological, social and sexual encounters. 'Difference' is writ large in this, as in all gender history; what it means to be religious cannot be understood without reference to issues of gender, age, class, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Nor is religiosity itself a fixed state. Several chapters make clear that one is never 'merely' Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist, just as one is never merely male or female, black or white. Instead, authors illustrate that not only are religious identities constantly inflected by other categories of difference but also that they are configured through both peaceful means and violent warfare. The following discussions revolve around four important current trajectories in the history of gender and religion around which we have structured the volume: transcultural exchanges, the body, sexuality and political aspects of religion.

Crossing cultures, and transcultural exchanges

Cultural syncretism, pluralism and spatial mobility are at the core of the history of many religions, and thus transcultural approaches to that history are crucially relevant to historians' analyses of religion in various periods and places. The spread of Buddhism from India into eastern Asia, of Islam from Arabia around the eastern and southern Mediterranean into central and south Asia, or of early Christianity from the eastern Mediterranean across Europe, involved complex interactions between the beliefs and practices of an expanding faith and those in the communities which it encountered. This can be seen in the growth of church-state relations and medieval sainthood in western Europe which developed out of accommodations between Christian, Roman and 'barbarian' elements, in the emergence of distinctive Tibetan, Sinhala or Chinese forms of Buddhism, and again in the crafting of the Muslim caliphate and of Sufi traditions from encounters between Muslim practices and Iranian or Indian influences. By the early modern period, as conquest and imperial power underpinned the expansion of Islam in India, of eastern Orthodoxy among the Slavs, of Roman Catholicism in the Americas and Asia, and of Protestantisms in North America and the Caribbean, new elements of cross-cultural exchange were layered into religious lives and institutions. The sharing of shrines and festivals by Muslim and Hindu villagers in northern India, the Mexican day of the dead and the crafting of Afro-Christian faiths among enslaved people in the Caribbean or Brazil, were outcomes of cross-cultural contacts shaped partly by state power and/or capitalistic colonial relationships. The more recent expressions of transcultural exchange across faiths and cultures, which are the focus of the pieces in this section of the volume, are thus embedded in longer histories. The legacy of Spanish rule in Mexico and long-standing Mexican links to the USA, like the centuries-long presence of Buddhism in China and of people of African descent in Cuba, as well as the extended period of British involvement in India, frame the specific topics discussed in those articles.

Gender is likewise central to studies of transcultural aspects of religious faith and practice. Gender practices ranging from dress codes to marriage and reproductive and sexual conduct have been constitutive of religious doctrines and of their collective or individual enactments in many faiths. Belief and practice have often been constituted around gender differences and roles for specialists and believers, and politicised by contests over, or subversions of, such differences; they may also be terrains on which gender difference can be sidestepped or problematised. As powerful and often persistent markers of material, political and cultural differences, gender arrangements and ideologies are likely to be important features in transcultural encounters between diverse faiths and power structures. Travellers, missionaries, imperial agents and intellectuals have often read the 'otherness' of the cultures which they encountered through the prisms of faith and gender, and colonial rulers and subjects have engaged with the lived outcomes of such readings, generating sources and discourses for historical study. In this volume four contributions demonstrate what can be achieved by such study.

The era of British involvement in India from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries was one in which issues of religion and gender played out dynamically in the encounters of colonial subjects in the subcontinent with rulers and 'experts'. British scholars, administrators and missionaries constructed varied notions of 'Hindus', 'Muslims' and 'Indians' around gendered practices including polygamy, child marriage, the erotic content of temple art and culture, gender segregation and widow burning. Alongside this, inhabitants of the subcontinent developed their own constructions of gender and faith in the era of modernity, making their own contributions to cross-cultural discourses on these matters. This can be seen in the refiguring of marriage and masculinity in colonial Bengal, in manoeuvrings around colonial restrictions by the courtesans of Lucknow, or in anti-colonial (often masculine) appropriations of gender rhetoric to assert cultural authenticity or claim leadership of 'reform'.⁴² Daniel Grey's piece in this volume explores how British ideas of 'the Hindu' in the first part of the nineteenth century brought together perceptions of widow burning, '*thagi*' (banditry) and female infanticide as distinctively gendered 'Hindu' practices.⁴³ It suggests both the importance of considering the *convergence* of British views of these practices, linked by the use of bodily violence, and the way such views shaped British constructions of Hindu masculinity as well as femininity.

Grey emphasises that much cultural effort was made by colonial interpreters of female infanticide, *thagi* and widow burning to construct perpetrators as male. This allowed them to construct chivalric/pious rescuers and reformers as the embodiments of British masculinity (as Spivak's white men 'saving' brown women), and British femininity as morally active on behalf of subordinate colonial sisters, thereby locating Indian gender practices within 'bad' religion. It is shown to be significant that British commentators made

efforts to erase the roles of women in infanticide, and of Muslims in *thagi*, in order to 'Hinduise' and gender their interpretations of these activities. In an interesting recasting of the 'mild Hindu' with his esoteric learning, favoured in much eighteenth-century British commentary on Hindu Indians, 'the Hindu' was now portrayed as savage and violent, moved to heinous acts by 'superstition' and 'fanaticism'. It may be noted that this reconstructed image drew on the growing ethnographic 'knowledge' (and imagination) of British observers like Sleeman, and the moral agendas of religious and secular reformers rather than on earlier engagement with religious texts and specialists. However, whether analysing the Shastras, reporting evidence from local informants, or constructing authoritative interpretations of the 'savage Hindu', Grey's argument shows the interplay of colonial authority with local knowledge, shaping a hybrid expertise in depicting and controlling colonial subjects.

One facet of the politics around widow burning in the 1820s was the involvement of educated Indian men in debating that question, whether as part of their own modernising agendas or in dialogue with colonial policy makers. If Grey's text deals with the role of colonial cultural power, Clare Midgley's study of interactions between the Bengal-based Brahmo Samaj, British Unitarians and American transcendentalists explicitly takes up the theme of cross-cultural exchange and cooperation.⁴⁴ The Brahmo venture can itself be seen as a syncretic project for developing links between Hinduism and cognate insights in other faiths, just as Unitarians and Transcendentalists explored notions of 'universal' religion. Midgley shows how the exchanges between Brahmo and Unitarian writers and activists centred on the task of arguing and implementing progress for women whether in England or Bengal. It suggests that Indians, Britons and Americans involved in these activities in the mid-nineteenth century were constituting cross-faith transnational 'liberal' and 'reforming' projects and networks, prefigured in the work of intellectuals like Rammohun Roy in the 1820s and 1830s. The exploration of journals, individual activists and organisations, with their nuanced responses to religious ideas from both Hindu and heterodox Protestant traditions complicates simple adversarial notions of colonial cultural politics or faith encounters, and foregrounds gender as a core topic for pious as well as 'secular' liberals and reformers of the period. It is sensitive to internal disagreements among Brahmo supporters over women's roles and autonomy and to Unitarian modifications to the cruder 'civilising mission' stance of many Britons, not least because of their dissident location and critical voice within the UK Protestant spectrum. Both Brahmos and Unitarians could position themselves as questioning reformers of their local gender status quo. This raises the interesting question of how far this analysis of interactive, if not equal, Brahmo/Unitarian relationships might challenge other views of how British feminism fed off colonial privilege and racial/religious 'othering', as well as off opposition to gender disadvantage and discrimination.⁴⁵

The historiography of the British *raj* in India has been a fertile ground for gender historians, including some who have focused on religion. However, the broader relevance of our themes is shown in other pieces which also emphasise cross-cultural exchange and religious syncretism in studies of Cuba, China and Mexico. Carolyn Watson examines transformations in practice and self-perception among followers of Ocha-Ifá, a religion of Yoruba origin established by Afro-Cubans in Cuba, as they responded to socio-political changes and cultural challenges between the era of slave emancipation in the 1890s and the present.⁴⁶ The article explores shifting gender roles, sexual meanings and interpretations of religious tradition among those involved in Ocha-Ifá. It considers the sexualised images of the faith constructed by Hispano-Cuban commentators, associating it with promiscuous extramarital sex in the early twentieth century, and with homosexuality and prostitution after the 1959 revolution. Watson also tracks contests and accommodations in gender roles and meanings within the cult from the 1930s as men took on divination roles performed by women, notably Victor Betancourt's late twentieth-century re-reading of African traditions which reaffirms female spiritual power and reframes gender and sexual identities among Ocha-Ifá initiates. The dense narrative enables analyses of the simultaneous preservation and reconstruction of West African traditions and the response of Ocha-Ifá followers to hetero-normative homophobic culture in Cuba, at odds with the sexual and gender fluidities which historically formed relationships between initiates, priests, the gods and seekers after spiritual favour. It demonstrates the agency and creativity of those involved in Ocha-Ifá over several generations, and the role of transnational and colonial legacies in their engagement with Yoruba traditions, and with the racialised legacies of colonial enslavement. Cross-cultural encounters with the dominant Hispanic or communist socio-political order and its changing sex-gender agendas, argues Watson, have shaped the survival and autonomy of Ocha-Ifá and its accommodation to those agendas.

Yuet Keung Lo's study of an eighteenth-century reworking of traditional biographies of Buddhist laywomen considers the intersections between faith traditions – two Buddhist pathways and Confucianism – in the work of Peng Jiqing, a pious Buddhist and Confucian scholar editing and supplementing texts inherited from earlier centuries.⁴⁷ Lo demonstrates how the editor's efforts at 'draconian' homogenisation of the lives of women following Chan or Pure Land versions of Buddhism within traditions of dynastic biography and Confucian convention did not conceal 'ideological incongruities and narrative differences'. This reveals both Peng's personal commitment to Confucian–Pure Land syncretism (which by his time included Chan Buddhist elements), and the different patterns of female religiosity in the two Buddhist traditions. Like the study of the lives of Irish saints in this issue by Zubin Mistry and the chapter on Assyriology by Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura (both discussed further below), this reminds us both of the

key role of the cultural norms of editors and interpreters of texts, and of the fluidity and complexity of hagiography and Buddhist spiritual practice. It thus offers perspectives on the varied ways in which Buddhist women might pursue their spiritual path, whether by assertive involvement with spiritual masters or by following more 'genteel' pious practices confirmed by such women's association with dreams and miracles. Readers see the gender, textual and doctrinal codes used to reconstitute long-gone lives in an eighteenth-century text. They can also glimpse women's negotiation of their own and others' spiritual expectations in an earlier period, as well as Peng's masculine scholarly negotiation of literary convention and religious syncretism to transmit models of female spirituality to his family and social circle.

The pieces by Lo and Watson explore change over time in conjunction with religious hybridity and fluidity. Kathleen MacIntyre's examination of the gendered presence of Baptists in the Oaxaca region of Mexico likewise deals intersectionally with pre-Christian faith practice, Roman Catholicism, Baptist Protestantism and the secularising agendas of the post-revolutionary period.⁴⁸ In considering the last of these, it invites further comparison with other contributions to this issue, specifically Joy Dixon's examination of the encounter of 'modern' psychological thought with Christian mysticism, Daniel Grey's work on 'secular' critiques of 'Hindu' practice, or Maya Corry's study of the links between humanism and Catholicism, noting that contact between the 'secular' and the 'religious' have been less studied than contests between them. MacIntyre's study of the 1920s and 1930s, and their more recent legacy, lays out the paradox of Baptist intervention in a Zapotec village being underpinned both by colonial discourses on 'backward' natives and by the new reformist nationalism of the post-Revolution Mexican regime. The role of Baptist women in this was marked by gendered approaches to missionary work (with a focus on childcare and food preparation among Zapotec women), by colonial/ethnic attitudes to 'natives' and by a commitment to civilising/modernising missions. Their appropriation of 'Catholic' discourses of martyrdom to depict the death of a male Baptist activist, and the use of tropes of progress and modernity to portray their work, like the transnational origins of Mexican Baptism in links to the USA, formed a cross-cultural basis for that work. Traditions of Protestant anti-Catholicism were refigured within a new civic/national culture in which Mexican women could be active if not enfranchised citizens, making or responding to calls of progress and Protestantism just as pious Catholic women actively resisted the new order. MacIntyre shows how the Baptist challenge to Catholicism was both faith-based and social, contesting established communal groupings, networks and festive gatherings, with their gendered patterns of participation, as well as sacred spaces and faith practices. The analysis illustrates the roles of religion, pro- and anti-Catholic female activism and memories of conflict and martyrdom in the shaping of new national/Christian/ethnic identities and

differences both in the 1920s and 1930s, and at the present time.

The centrality of conversion, expansion and eclecticism in the history of so many faiths makes transcultural analysis an important tool for historians of religion. Discussion of the reworking of twelfth- and eighteenth-century Buddhism in relation to Confucianism, of re-readings of African religion in 1980s Cuba, and of links between modernising Hindus and Unitarians in nineteenth-century India and England illustrate the shaping roles of syncretic initiatives and cross-faith exchanges. They also demonstrate the gendered character of such initiatives and exchanges, whether constructing exemplars of Buddhist women, negotiating roles for male and female Ocha-Ifá priests in Cuba, or challenging Hindu widow burning and *thagi* and Zapotec women's Catholic and 'native' culture. By analysing the composite, changing versions of sexed and gendered belief and practice in these diverse transcultural, colonial and postcolonial settings, this group of articles opens up a range of understandings and possibilities for future work on gender and religion. By setting the specificities of time and place in a dynamic relationship to spatial mobility and cultural hybridity, they offer models and challenges for that work.

Religion, embodiment and subjectivity

The history of the body is a vibrant field of scholarship articulated in theoretically sophisticated discussions concerning, *inter alia*, periodisation, textual representations and the social disciplining and management of the body as constitutive of various national and political agendas (Foucault's influential notion of biopolitics).⁴⁹ In addition to its multiple historical understandings, the extent to which the material and physical experiences of the body can be fully assimilated into its discursive effects has stimulated much debate. In consequence, Kathleen Canning argues that 'the body' remains a largely elusive and unexplicated historical concept.⁵⁰ Nonetheless its visual, material and symbolic centrality to the spiritual performances and identities of women and men, a dominant theme in this volume, is incontrovertible. Historically and theologically, the status of the body vis-à-vis the mind, soul or spirit has proved persistently contentious, regarded in highly gender-specific ways across many religious traditions as the site of physical temptation, impurity and mortal finitude. Yet despite such theological and doctrinal anti-somatism, as Esme Cleall notes in her discussion of the nineteenth-century deaf mute, 'religion is experienced through the body and the kind of body shapes the way in which religion is felt and practised'. Arguably anti-somatism does not so much deny the body as make it central to faith, thought and practice. Whether in the meditation techniques of Hindu Swamis, medieval Christian veneration of saintly relics, belief in the curative power of bodily effluvia, Muslim and Jewish dietary laws, or the physical demands of pilgrimage in many faiths, demonstrated in

pieces in this section and elsewhere, the body remains a significant site of divine revelation. Stress on bodily suffering or asceticism in sainthood and martyrdom in Christian and Muslim traditions, or on the search for transcendence of the body in Hindu and Buddhist faiths, embed somatic tropes in belief and practice. The role of religiously sanctioned and gender specific codes for dress and body presentation, whether for Hindu widows, pious Muslims, or Christian penitents and members of religious orders, is another pervasive expression of the convergence between faith and body practices and meanings.⁵¹

The concept of ‘embodiment’ – what Canning has described as the process of ‘making and doing the work of bodies – of becoming a body in social space’ – best expresses the historically contingent and mutually constitutive ways in which differences of religion and gender have shaped individual subjectivities and their social representations.⁵² As the religion of the incarnation, in which God took human form in the figure of Jesus Christ, the Christian tradition is the subject for many of the essays in this section. They can be compared with articles dealing with other traditions. Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura's discussion of Assyriological historiography focuses on the politics of gender at work in the (re)production of historical knowledge about the female body.⁵³ Despite the proliferation of languages, chronologies and geographies (and, by implication, notions of the sacred) found in cuneiform texts, they argue that Jewish and rabbinical traditions of female ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ disproportionately and adversely influenced decades of French translators’ historical reconstructions of ancient Mesopotamian evidence on women. Negative Old Testament associations of menstruation with contagion and impurity have persisted in the face of textual evidence to the contrary, illustrated in Couto-Ferreira and Garcia-Ventura's examination of a Mari letter dating from the eighteenth century BCE. The false universalisation of a historically specific Jewish woman/impurity binary has, they propose, resulted in a misleading androcentric discourse within Assyriological studies.

Anne Bailey also explores the literary transmission and textual precedents of a particular female bodily performance, that of lamentation, this time in twelfth-century English and French hagiographies.⁵⁴ She observes that female lamentation was not the spontaneous, physical and frenzied outpouring of emotional and devotional grief commonly assumed, nor did it originate during the Middle Ages. Rather, its highly ritualised and formulaic elements, including body laceration and the tearing of clothes or hair, were the accretion of centuries of classical Greek, biblical and apocryphal traditions. It also recalls practices in Muslim communities, notably the ritualised public weeping associated with commemorations of the martyrdom of Husein in the Shi'a tradition. Despite Christian denunciations of lamentation as a pagan form of ‘ritual madness’, its key tropes of weeping, wailing and violent gesticulation were reconfigured as signs of divine grace in the lives of late

medieval female saints and pious laywomen like Margery Kempe. Set within a ritualistic rather than a psychological framework, Bailey follows Caroline Walker Bynum's germinal thesis that public expressions of corporeal piety were taken up with particular enthusiasm by women as a means to empowerment and spiritual agency.⁵⁵ The extent to which hagiographical discourses of ritualised grief realistically portrayed women's devotional activities or were merely literary productions of conventional motifs remains unresolved, and Bailey suggests that cultural practices and representations of lamentation were probably mutually reinforcing.

The remaining three pieces in this section on viewing, sight and deafness, provide fascinating perspectives on the profoundly sensory experiences of faith. Working at the intersection of architectural and gender analysis, Michelle Sauer's innovative study of the female gaze and the medieval English anchorhold illustrates important ways in which physical space shaped individual piety.⁵⁶ Literally entombed in her cell, the anchoress lived permanently under the gaze of Christ, her spouse (and vice versa) through the squint, a window revealing the high altar and the consecration of the Mass. As Sauer reminds us, medieval ocular theory regarded sight as the most dangerous of the senses, related to both the gaining of knowledge and carnal desire. The complicating presence of the (potentially polluting) female anchorite's body within the cell's sacred space necessitated further architectural alteration. Squints in female-occupied cells were frequently given a cruciform shape, controlling the woman's view through the outline of Christ's own sacrifice. Others were positioned to narrow the sightline and compel penitential postures of kneeling or lying (an additional somatic discipline), thus mitigating the greater lustfulness of female sight and avoiding any undue eroticisation of the sacramental act of seeing.

The contiguity of the devotional and the sensual gaze is likewise considered by Maya Corry's absorbing analysis of the spiritual significance of beauty, youth and the male body in the iconography of 'Leonardesque' pictures produced for the court of renaissance Milan.⁵⁷ According to Corry, art historians have seriously underestimated the contribution of religious ideas to such pictures, reading them as little more than derivative imitations of Leonardo da Vinci's work, with their presumed clues to his personal sexual proclivities. Instead she proposes that these androgynous images operated as 'serious devotional tools' in elite Italian culture, augmenting wider theories of visible bodily beauty (exemplified by youth and the physical perfection of the male form) as an expression of interior holiness and virtue. As in Sauer's piece, Corry argues that sight was thought dangerous and apt to stimulate both devotional revelation and sinful erotic thoughts. However the androgyny of these Leonardesque male forms, representing the harmony of gender and divine perfection, rendered them transcendental and humanly unattainable. Thus the androgynous body could inspire a focus on the sacred rather than a

sexual response.

As a new subject of historical analysis, the topic of the deaf mute examined by Esme Cleall both extends and complicates the intersectionality of religion and gender as categories of difference within embodied religious experience.⁵⁸ Most significantly, Cleall's analysis of religious discourses on deafness in nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland challenges the role of gender as a defining category of identity, arguing that it was deafness, not sexual difference, that destabilised the personhood and subjectivity of those unable to hear the word of God. In a predominantly evangelical, biblically-based culture (and Cleall's discussion of the New Testament's problematic alignment of able-bodiedness with salvation is striking), deafness was a decisive form of 'otherness'. As a newly created missionary domain of social regulation, the devout deaf subject (suitably desexualised and emotionally infantilised in specifically gendered ways) became a popular Victorian trope. Cleall notes that Christian missions could also function as spaces of resistance for deaf identity and community formations. While still largely ignored by historians, the difference represented by disability poses a profound theoretical challenge to histories of gender, religion and the body: as Cleall puts it, 'when identities of religion, gender and disability coincide, they change, they do not simply compile'.⁵⁹

Religion, gender and sexuality

Arguably it is in the history of sexuality – a protean concept including the private emotional, psychological and imaginative aspects of individual desire, and the wider social and political implications of moral conduct – more than any other area of modern gender history that post-secular approaches have most revitalised interest in deconstructing the boundaries of the sacred and the secular. Historians like Dagmar Herzog, Anna Clark, Timothy Jones, Harry Cocks, Joy Dixon and Marcus Collins have increasingly acknowledged the influence of religious and spiritual discourses in the making of modern sexual cultures.⁶⁰ This is not to deny that, post Foucault, the field remains dominated by accounts of the inexorable medicalisation and secularisation of modern sex, shifting from a once sinful to a criminal, then pathological category. Nor is it to ignore institutional religion's powerful capacity as a site of sexual know-ledge to reinforce heteronormative identities and censor alternative male and female sexualities often in coercive ways; indeed, it is precisely because of this continuing legacy that the sexual politics of religion merits further historical attention. However, a body of work now exists which deals excitingly with religious discourses on marriage, contraception and homosexuality, and the reciprocity of scientific discourses such as sexology or psychology and heterodox spiritualities. Other work considers the importance of conservative sexual politics in the acculturation of immigrant religious communities, and the gendered dimensions of the churches' public

involvement in anti-vice campaigns over the last two centuries.⁶¹ For some historians, sexuality and gender constitute the most productive formations through which to critically historicise (and recuperate) ‘the religious’ in a post-secular age. For others like Callum Brown, sex (specifically the sexual revolution of the 1960s) signals not the reconstruction of new potentialities but the death-knell of religion.⁶² As with historians of Islam and of western Christianity in earlier periods, it is the gendered interactions and hybridities of sacred and secular which are seen as productive fields for enquiry.

The chapters in this section assert the deeply imbricated nature of religion and sexuality as significant cultural formations, tracing diverse ways in which differing Christian theologies have shaped sexual identities and practices between the seventh and twentieth centuries. Zubin Mistry explores the remarkable fluidity of sexual categories present in the early medieval Irish historiography of ‘abortion miracles’ where sexually lapsed religious women were restored to virginal status through the intervention of male and female abortionist saints.⁶³ He observes that sexual chastity was a crucial but fragile sign of religious distinction, a status as much spiritual as physical. Later redactors often omitted these seventh-century abortion motifs, discomfited by the prospect of an impregnated devout woman and the termination of life. Like the commentators on Assyrian texts discussed by Couto-Ferreira and Garcia-Ventura, those editors brought their own cultural baggage to their work. According to Mistry, however, what made these acts of recuperative chastity miraculous – the reconciliation of individuals with their communities after the disruption of sexual sin – ‘gravitates around gender in a different sense’. In abortion miracles, the disappearance of an unwanted foetus redeemed the woman from the physical and symbolic degradation of a bloody miscarriage or childbirth itself – at once a strikingly permissive and conventional attitude towards female sexuality. Chastity, and with it the avoidance of marital sex and parturition, contends Mistry, enabled a transformation of gendered practice, even as it was transgressed.

Pat Cullum also discusses chastity and the significance of spiritual rather than physical virginity in her essay on the attractions of the celibate life for late-medieval English laymen.⁶⁴ Married men, she notes, could affirm their virginal status by entering monastic life later in old age; the appeal of lay celibacy was evident in cults of virgin bishops and saints as well as in the popular lives of virgin kings whose non-sexual existence symbolised the unity, peace and sexual well-being of the kingdom and its subjects. Cullum makes the important point that despite celibacy remaining the only sanctioned alternative to marriage within many religions, and being attributed superior spiritual authority within Roman Catholicism, it is non-sexual rather than homosexual men who have disappeared from view in recent histories of sexuality. The naturalisation of compulsory male (hetero)sexuality (itself the gendered product of the modern period, as Cullum reminds us) has rendered

male chastity as a positive sexual choice something of a 'cultural fiction'. In contrast, Joseph Alter's work shows how male celibacy within Hinduism was linked more positively to national strength and moral integrity.⁶⁵ Yet while histories of female celibacy show that single women and women religious often transformed their lives into respectable and respected public forms of spiritual and moral service, celibacy's contested status as sexually transgressive and the source of inter-denominational and inter-religious conflict has persisted. The Victorian revival of Catholic and Anglican sisterhoods stimulated debate on the sexual dangers of conventual life and its challenge to the heterosexual Protestant family idyll, feeding into virulent anti-Catholic propaganda in what Ellis Hanson has described as the 'pornography of Puritanism'.⁶⁶ This echoes sixteenth-century contests over celibacy within emergent Protestant thought and practice. As Cullum observes, the history of celibacy in the history of modern sexuality has yet to be written, and if we occlude men's interest in that, we simply reinscribe conventional sexual binaries.

Christian theological imperatives to heterosexuality framed by 'holy matrimony' were ubiquitous, but religious discourse could also facilitate emotional and physical spaces for the performance of dissident sexualities. According to Harry Cocks, pre-modern western Christianity was in many ways 'culturally queer', expressed through 'a variety of polymorphous and unspecific transgressions of gender and sexuality'.⁶⁷ Susan Gane's absorbing exploration of the spiritual dynamics of two eighteenth-century soldiers' same-sex love and the reaction of their military and religious contemporaries attests to this.⁶⁸ She notes that more threatening to martial masculinity than physical same-sex passion were these men's mutual emotional support and religious commitment which enabled them to live out their unconventional homoerotic love. Recounted within a seemingly orthodox Methodist conversion narrative of fall and redemption, the swashbuckling Sampson Staniforth's references to 'the unpardonable sin' and 'sweet communion' reinforce Martha Vicinus's observations on the pervasiveness of religious metaphors in same-sex affections and the mutually constitutive vocabularies of religious ecstasy and sexual attraction.⁶⁹ Staniforth's coexisting marriage and Gane's reluctance to apply the label 'homosexual' to these men recall Anna Clark's concept of 'twilight moments' in which same-sex passion produced not fixed sexual identities but indeterminate zones between hetero- and homosexual practices where socially prohibited erotic behaviour could form part of ordinary life.⁷⁰ As Gane's essay shows, ardent piety was the determining factor in facilitating such emotional relationships. Religion, therefore, has much to offer historians when testing the limitations of identity history.

By the early twentieth century, the more fluid cultural status of same-sex friendships had diminished in the face of sexological and psychological

classifications. The sexualisation of mystical experience in these new scientific vocabularies constructed undercurrents of hysteria and pathology in which religious enthusiasm and spiritual ecstasy were reconfigured by psychologists as perverted sexuality: the eroticised body had become an embarrassing impediment to, rather than a vehicle of, spiritual and mystical revelation. In her insightful exploration of the prominent Anglican modernist writer Evelyn Underhill, Joy Dixon discusses the complex theological tensions at work for those who, during a period of intellectual and scientific transformation, 'took both their religion and their psychology seriously'.⁷¹ Underhill's efforts to promote a psychological theory of mysticism took her through a series of important theological manoeuvres: translating religious into psychological language led her to a reading of spirituality as a superior form of psychic energy and the sex instinct as a 'displacement or repression' of the 'God-instinct'. Dixon's perceptive essay demonstrates precisely how much 'theology matters' to histories of modern sexuality and gender by challenging fixed binaries of the sacred and the secular, and reconceptualising larger historical narratives of modernity and secularisation.

Mary Vincent likewise explores the theological antecedents of male and female sexuality in her discussion of inter- and intra-confessional religious violence in twentieth-century Spain.⁷² Heightened by the hyper-reality of much Spanish religious iconography, Vincent argues that theological clashes between the body and the word were played out in particularly graphic and visceral ways during the 1930s and 1940s. Dagmar Herzog has shown how the use of sexual violence during times of war forms part of a spectrum of brutality including torture, mutilation and death.⁷³ Vincent's account illustrates the religious motivations behind such brutality, in which competing views of the incarnation, during and after the Spanish Civil War, produced denominationally specific forms of violence which were profoundly gendered and intensely sexual. According to Vincent, the recurrent castration and mutilation of priests' bodies throughout the military conflict was anti-religious as much as anti-clerical, their masculinity being representative not just of the Church's power but of the incarnate Christ himself. Perceptions of the deficiency of clerical masculinity are all too apparent in Vincent's compelling account. Priestly celibacy was seen as an affront to virile Spanish male sexuality as was the confessional, a powerful motif in anti-Catholic propaganda, regarded as prying into the sexual concerns of other men's wives and families. At a theological level, emphasis upon the suffering humanity of Christ in twentieth-century Spanish religious iconography, whether in worship or festivals, is an interesting inversion of traditional associations of women with the sexed body. Whereas holy statues of the Virgin Mary became increasingly devoid of associations with sexual or physical humanity, graphic artistic depictions of Christ's tortured and bleeding body identified men, and particularly clerical masculinity, as repositories of suffering.

Gender, religion and political activity

As recent scholarship on 'political' Islam, on the politics of the 'religious right' in the USA, on Hindu communalism and on liberation theology has demonstrated, religious beliefs, communities and meanings have been constitutive of the political domain in many past settings. From the sexualisation of official attacks on medieval 'heresy', to partnerships between religious and governmental institutions in the regulation of sexual marital or reproductive conduct, gender has been a key feature of those processes. It is regrettable that this volume does not provide pre-modern examples in the tradition of Denise Spellberg's work on early Islam, Lyndal Roper's work on Reformation Europe, or on medieval holiness and kingship.⁷⁴ However the three pieces here, dealing with nineteenth- and twentieth-century situations in India and Greece, do make valuable contributions to the field.

Chronologically earliest is Wilson Chacko Jacob's discussion of the gendered dynamics of encounters between religious leadership in a Muslim community and the early British colonial state in Kerala, South India.⁷⁵ Engaging critically with Foucault's notions of governmentality and knowledge/power relations, it explores these encounters along the axes of political violence, conflicting sovereignties and gendered property rights between the 1770s and the 1850s. It suggests that as the Alawi Muslim Mappilas (not just a local grouping, but part of a transnational community) confronted Hindus, indigenous state structures and the encroaching British, 'religion and politics were mediated by gender, which in turn produced a new conception of all three'. It deconstructs British colonial texts and Mappila accounts of specific confrontational events to tease out divergent understandings of sovereign responsibility among British officials, local landowners and Sayyid Alawi, the Mappila leader, in relation to gender, religious conversion and female modesty. The analysis disrupts linear readings of the advance of liberal colonialism, or 'east/west dichotomies', by showing how the personhood and 'rights' of the Kerala women whose conversion provoked conflict was marginalised by the 'modernising' colonial authorities and sustained by the spiritual and material authority of Sayyid Alawi. Its consideration of the use of categories such as the 'fanatical/violent Muslim' is reminiscent of Grey's piece in this volume. The sophisticated analysis of intersecting political agendas and unstable concepts offers richer and more subtle understandings of the gendered construction of colonial dominance, not simply 'over' colonial subjects, but in a complex web of different gendered politico-cultural agendas.

Like Jacob's piece, Effi Gazi's discussion of the history of ideas of 'Fatherland, Religion, Family' in Greek politics between the 1880s and the Second World War follows a long historical arc.⁷⁶ It relocates gender issues and images to a central position in accounts of the emergence of new forms of religiously inflected rightist rhetoric and activity in the challenged Greek polity of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Not only was the

language of this reconstituted rightism explicitly anti-feminist, it targeted girls' education and women activists for public attack and physical violence, a phenomenon disregarded in other narratives of this right-wing movement. In both contexts, projects for the expansion of education and social opportunities for women were denigrated as flouting 'natural' female familial roles and mental capacities, a strategy which sat alongside rightist attacks on Marxist and Darwinist thought. Formed within confrontation politics at the start of the twentieth century, they passed their legacy on into the interwar period and cold war anti-communism. Gazi notes that this development was not unique to Greece but can be compared with developments in Italy, Iberia and France in the same period, making suggestive points about the opening up of spaces for 'right-wing feminism' within a repressive gender project. One aspect of the Greek situation discussed here which parallels accounts of religious complexity elsewhere in this volume, is the grounding of new rightist ideologies in innovative, even dissident trends within Greek Orthodox religion rather than in established tradition. Much of the politico-cultural work which underpinned the success of the triad 'Fatherland, religion, family' was undertaken by heterodox religious thinkers, and involved lay brotherhoods as much as the church hierarchy. The study offers readers new narratives which can be taken back into the ongoing discussions of the multivalent and contradictory aspects of 'modernity'.

Rina Williams's essay on the gendered politics of 'Hindu laws' in twentieth-century India also adopts a long arc approach, and explicitly establishes temporal comparison as its main strategy.⁷⁷ This enables the construction of an argument about the legacy of colonial practices regarding religiously based and gendered legislation in independent India. While exploring changes in both the terms and participants in the formation of 'personal' (i.e. family) laws on marriage and inheritance it proposes that 'the fundamentally religious and gendered character of governance' was a lasting legacy of colonial rule. In the 1950s, the makers of the legislative framework of independent India used the rhetoric of gender reform as a marker of progress and modernity much as it had been employed in colonial constructions of a civilising role, and matched this by appeals to text and custom in defence of existing practices comparable to those found in the colonial past. Although the balance of interest in religious practice as against gender rights had shifted towards the latter in debates on personal law reform fifty years later, references to the Shastras and to the *Mahabharata* still figure in the latter set of arguments. So, too, do references to the view which went back to colonial times that the status and treatment of women was a key criterion for judging the state of progress and civilisation in any society. The argument here is not that perspectives remained constant across the colonial/postcolonial divide but, more interestingly, that gender and religion have been the terrain on which governments, whether colonial or postcolonial, have regularly constructed their changing versions of modernity, community and governance. The

insights in this article link it to work around gender, governance, religion and modernisation in Europe and in the colonial world from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries; this ranges from Linda Colley's exploration of the role of women and Protestantism in the shaping of 'British patriotism' and Catherine Hall's analyses of gender, religion and empire, to Tanika Sarkar's study of gender and Hinduism, and work on the colonial and postcolonial Middle East.⁷⁸ This focus on women and religion as constitutive of state-led projects to control, modernise or otherwise manage subjects speaks to MacIntyre's study of the post-revolutionary Mexican state, Grey's discussion of the British *raj* and Watson's comments on post-emancipation and revolutionary Cuba, as well as to the other pieces in this section of the volume.

Future perspectives

As Laura Schwartz suggests, the burgeoning of studies of gender, religion and historical agency in the last ten years means that familiar complaints about gender history's failure to 'take religion seriously' may well have outlived their relevance.⁷⁹ What has been called 'the religious turn', a somewhat imprecise development, but one recognised in this volume, has prompted renewed interest in the cultural and historical significance of theological and spiritual discourses within the lived realities and contradictory formations of gender. This 'turn' has been located by scholars within a wider 'post-secular' moment, a term invoked notably by Jurgen Habermas to denote changes in public consciousness caused by the manifest vibrancy of global faith communities, the continued public activism of religious organisations and the impact of 'immigrant' cultures.⁸⁰ Central to post-secular analyses has been the recognition that the master narrative of secularisation (that secularity is constitutive of modernity) fails on both conceptual and empirical grounds. Historians of religion have shown that secularisation (or, more accurately, de-Christianisation) is a far more complex, diverse and partial process than once thought. In most of South Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America as well as parts of eastern and southern Europe, religious disaffection has either been delayed or experienced in more limited forms. The recent history of political Islam, of Hindu communalism, or of evangelicalism in South America, are highly visible examples indicating that reports of the death of faith are indeed much exaggerated. Moreover, even where secularisation seems evident in the affluent societies of northern Europe, Canada, the USA and Australasia, it has been subject to particular national sensibilities and idiosyncrasies.⁸¹ Religion may indeed have been marginalised, but discerning precisely how, when, and why, is a more difficult matter.

For Callum Brown, the post-secular refers emphatically to religious decline – specifically the unprecedented demographic growth of 'no-religionism'

(defined as positions including secularism, atheism, rationalism, free thought, humanism, agnosticism and religious apathy) in Ireland, the UK, Canada and the USA since the alleged sexual revolution of the 1960s. For Brown, gender is central to understanding this change. He argues that not only have more women than men abandoned their faith in the last forty years, but, more problematically, that the experience itself has also been profoundly gendered; whereas men 'lost' religion mainly through intellectual challenges and reasoned argument, he claims, for women the rejection of religion has assumed a deeper counter-cultural, ontological expression.⁸² Brown's work is path-breaking and provocative in equal measure, but for many post-secular historians, the story is less about religious decay and more about religion's capacity for transformation, survival and adaptation. As Tim Jones observes, the majority of historians of gender and sexuality have embraced moves beyond the restrictive secular/religious binary 'to attend more closely to ways that theology and concepts of the spiritual and metaphysical shape historic understandings and events'.⁸³ Work on western Christianity can be compared with debates in Iranian studies which address the dynamics of 'religious' and 'secular' in gender and nationalist politics.⁸⁴ The analytical potential of gender or sexuality as categories through which to illustrate the 'liquid', shape-shifting qualities of religion is a challenge yet to be fully undertaken but one which is signalled by the contributions in this volume.

A stable and persuasive theoretical reading of the 'religious turn' in gender history has yet to emerge. However, as the studies here indicate, what we arguably need are more dynamic epistemological frameworks for considering the many associated tensions between the human and the transcendent, the local and universal dimensions of spiritual experience, and the diverse performances of gender within and against religion in specific cultural, political and material contexts. What biographical and psychological factors influenced the spiritual development of particular individuals? How might the interiority of religious subjectivity as a legitimate subject of historical study relate to emergent work on the history of emotions, or of power relations, whether intimate and familial, communal, 'national' or global? How can the primacy of Christianity as the paradigm for religious history which has dominated western scholarship, and confined work on other faith traditions on the 'specialist' terrains of colonial or area studies, segue into less ethnocentric approaches? As editors, we celebrate the fact that this issue contains material on China, Spain, Cuba, Greece, India, Italy, Mexico, Ireland and Mesopotamia as well as the UK, and on Afro-Cuban faiths, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and ancient Mesopotamian religion as well as several Christian denominations. Nonetheless, we are equally conscious of the absence of work on Judaism and African religions or on Middle Eastern, northern or eastern European, African, and Australasian perspectives from the collection. Both the presences and the absences indicate the importance of fully comparative and cross-cultural as well as cross-temporal comparisons for properly nuanced

considerations of gender and religion.

A few further questions may suffice to illustrate how the articles in this volume might contribute to a productive future for histories of gender and religion. Do the analyses of Leonardesque religious images or same-sex love between Methodists problematise Christian heteronormativity? How might the work of Baptists among Zapotecs or of Unitarians with Brahmo Samaj members, and Indo-Islamic encounters with the British *raj* presented here enhance or modify existing understandings of gender, religion and colonialism? Will the accounts of the intersections of Buddhism and Confucianism, of early-modern humanism and Catholicism, of African and Cuban rituals, or of nationalisms and faiths in Mexico, Greece and India, cause us to rethink models of gender or feminism, not just in terms of human agency but of human sovereignty and personhood? How do readings of textual transformation in Buddhist biographies, Christian saints' lives, or nineteenth-century editions of Assyriological texts, reinforce or modify Foucauldian understandings of gender, knowledge and power? Do narratives of the Alawis in Malabar, of Hinduisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or of postcolonial Cuba and Mexico suggest new periodisations, or a reconfiguration of modernity as a more fragmented and localised process? Above all, do the studies here of lay chastity and piety in China and medieval England as well as of nationalisms, gender and religion in Greece, Mexico, Spain and India encourage approaches in which the sacred and the secular are treated as symbiotic rather than opposed? The essays in this volume encourage historians to be attentive to the important role of theology in gender history, to gender and sacred space, and to disability and personhood. They also encourage us to develop new understandings of sexuality and of challenges to the masculine (hetero)sexual imperative found in mourning rituals, in religious art and iconography (Chinese or European), and in sensory responses to texts and artworks. Finally, they suggest the value of further work on gendered histories of the physical and material manifestations of faith and worship (objects, buildings, paintings, bodily performance) as well as on written texts.

In conclusion, it may be useful to remind ourselves of the instability and complexity of the two core categories deployed in this special issue and the scholarship within which it is embedded. The anthropologist Michael Gilsenan proposed that 'religion is at once too general and too restrictive' to capture the complex and sometimes contradictory bodies of belief, practice, institutions, meanings and relationships involved in human dealings with the spiritual or divine. Work by anthropologists such as Reinhold Loeffler and Erika Friedl has similarly been grounded upon insights into the polyvalent, indeterminate and embedded nature of such dealings. This of course echoes a similar analysis of 'gender' by Joan Scott, further interrogated by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Jeanne Boydston and Afsaneh Najmabadi.⁸⁵ This

sense of indeterminacy and complexity should not be used to validate a retreat into empirical detail or description, but rather to stimulate further discriminating, nuanced uses and critiques of the conceptual and methodological tools and insights deployed in existing scholarship. If the studies in this volume assist this purpose, they will deserve a welcome above and beyond their valuable specific contributions to historical knowledge and understanding.

Notes

- 1 Dominic Erdozain, 'The Secularisation of Sin in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62 (2011), pp. 59–88, here p. 65.
- 2 See Ursula King (ed.), *Religion and Gender* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995); Pete Sigal, 'Imagining Cihuacoatl: Masculine Rituals, Nahua Goddesses and the Texts of the Tlacuilos', *Gender & History* 22 (2010), pp. 538–63.
- 3 See e.g., Sandra McGee Deutsch, 'The Catholic Church, Work, and Womanhood in Argentina, 1890–1930', *Gender & History* 3 (1991), pp. 304–25; Ulinka Rublack, 'Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus in Late Medieval Dominican Convents', *Gender & History* 6 (1994), pp. 37–57; Judith Tylor Baumel, 'Social Interaction among Jewish Women in Crisis during the Holocaust: A Case Study', *Gender & History* 7 (1995), pp. 64–84; Luisa Accati, 'Explicit Meanings: Catholicism, Matriarchy and the Distinctive Problems of Italian Feminism', *Gender & History* 7 (1995), pp. 241–59; Patrick McDevitt, 'Muscular Catholicism: Nationalism, Masculinity, and Gaelic Team Sports, 1884–1916', *Gender & History* 9 (1997), pp. 262–84; Natasha Erlank, 'Sexual Misconduct and Church Power on Scottish Mission Stations in Xhosaland, South Africa, in the 1840s', *Gender & History* 15 (2003), pp. 69–84; Helen Plant, 'Subjective Testimonies': Women Quaker Ministers and Spiritual Authority in England: 1750–1825', *Gender & History* 15 (2003), pp. 296–318; J. Lorand Matory, 'Gendered Agendas: The Secrets Scholars Keep about Yorùbá-Atlantic Religion', *Gender & History* 15 (2003), pp. 409–39; Peter Sherlock, 'Monuments, Reputation and Clerical Marriage in Reformation England: Bishop Barlow's Daughters', *Gender & History* 16 (2004), pp. 58–82; Marc Baer, 'Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul', *Gender & History* 16 (2004), pp. 425–58; Jennifer Thibodeaux, 'Man of the Church, or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy', *Gender & History* 18 (2006), pp. 380–99; Sharron Strocchia, 'When the Bishop Married the Abbess: Masculinity and Power in Florentine Episcopal Entry Rites, 1300–1600', *Gender & History* 19 (2007), pp. 346–68; Anne O'Brien, 'Missionary Masculinities, the

- Homoerotic Gaze and the Politics of Race: Gilbert White in Northern Australia, 1885–1915’, *Gender & History* 20 (2008), pp. 68–85; Marjorie Plummer, ‘Partner in his Calamities’: Pastors’ Wives, Married Nuns and the Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation’, *Gender & History* 20 (2008), pp. 207–27.
- 4 See Barbara Welter, ‘The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860’, *American Quarterly* 18 (1966), pp. 151–74; Barbara Welter, ‘The Feminization of American Religion, 1800–1860’, in Mary Hartmann and L. Banner (eds), *Clio’s Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 137–57.
 - 5 See Catherine A. Brekus (ed.), *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), for a very useful introductory overview of the history of American women and religion and discussions of indicative titles from the huge US literature including William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
 - 6 See Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History* (London: Pluto Press, 1973); Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983); Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
 - 7 Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500–1720* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4.
 - 8 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (1987; London: Routledge, 2002). See also Catherine Hall, ‘The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology’, in Catherine Hall (ed.), *White, Male and Middle Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 75–93.
 - 9 Studies of irreligious women remain few and far between. See Callum G. Brown, ‘“The Unholy Mrs Knight” and the BBC: Secular Humanism and the Threat to the “Christian Nation”, c.1945–60’, *English Historical Review* 127 (2012), pp. 345–76; Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women’s Emancipation in England, 1830–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). For early discussions of the feminisation of religion thesis, see Welter, ‘Feminization of American Religion’; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977). For comparative national studies of the

- feminisation thesis and its limitations, see Patrick Pasture, Jan Art and Thomas Buerman (eds), *Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe: Beyond the Feminization Thesis* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012). See also Ann Braude, 'Women's History is American Religious History', in Thomas A. Tweed (ed.), *Retelling US Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 87–107.
- 10 Jean Spence, 'Working for Jewish Girls: Lily Montagu, Girls' Clubs and Industrial Reform, 1890–1914', *Women's History Review* 13 (2004), pp. 491–509; Shari Rabin, '"The Advent of a Western Jewess": Rachel Frank and Jewish Female Celebrity in 1890s America', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 22 (2011), pp. 111–35; Susan L. Tananbaum, 'Democratizing British–Jewish Philanthropy: The Union of Jewish Women (1902–1930)', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 20 (2010), pp. 57–79. Thanks to Susan Tananbaum for conversations on this subject.
 - 11 Anne Summers, 'Gender, Religion and an Immigrant Minority: Jewish Women and the Suffrage Movement in Britain c.1900–1920', *Women's History Review* 21 (2012), pp. 399–418, here p. 410; Benjamin Baader, *Gender, Judaism and Bourgeois Culture in Germany 1880–1870* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
 - 12 See e.g., Gail Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women 1760–1930* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); S. Karly Kehoe, *Creating the Scottish Church: Catholicism, Gender and Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Rickie Burman, 'Jewish Women and the Household Economy in Manchester, c.1880–1920', in David Cesarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 55–75; Sue Morgan and Jacqueline de Vries (eds), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940* (London: Routledge, 2010).
 - 13 See e.g., Loriljai Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex and Speech in Tantra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (eds), *Gender and Narrative in the Mahabharata* (London: Routledge, 2007); Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Bernard Faure, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Susanne Mrozik, *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Ada Rapoport-Albert, *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi* (Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011); Miriam Peskowitz, 'Engendering Jewish Religious History', in

Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (eds), *Judaism since Gender* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 17–39; Hava Tirosch-Samuelson, ‘Gender in Jewish Mysticism’, in Frederick E. Greenspahn (ed.), *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), pp. 191–230; Chava Weissler, ‘Vernacular Kabbalah, Embodiment and Women in the Early Modern and Contemporary Periods’, in Marion Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore (eds), *Gender and Jewish History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Gail Labovitz, *Marriage and Metaphor: Constructions of Gender in Rabbinic Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); Peter Shafer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Charlotte Elishiva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Constructions of Biblical Gender* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000).

- 14 See Padma Anagol, ‘Indian Christian Women and Indigenous Feminism, c.1850 – c.1920’, in Karen Offen (ed.), *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789–1945* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 96–110; Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); Rhonda Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2003). See also Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); R. Todd Romero, *Making War and Minting Christians: Masculinity, Religion and Colonisation in Early New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), esp. chs 2, 5–8, pp. 31–45, 71–136; Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Creating the Cult of St Joseph: Art and Gender in the Sixteenth Century Spanish Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Haruko Nawata Ward, *Women Religious Leaders in Japan's Christian Century, 1546–1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Anusha Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ragnhild Johnsrud Zorgati, *Pluralism in the Middle Ages: Hybrid Identities, Conversion, and Mixed Marriages in Medieval Iberia* (London: Routledge, 2012); Mary Elizabeth Perry, *The Handless Maiden: Moriscos and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 15 Jacqueline deVries, ‘More than Paradoxes to Offer: Feminism, History and Religious Cultures’, in Morgan and deVries (eds), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures*, pp. 188–210; De Vries, ‘Challenging Traditions: Denominational Feminism in Britain, 1910–1920’, in Billie Melman (ed.), *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870–1930* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 266–83. See also Summers, ‘Gender,

- Religion and an Immigrant Minority'; Sue Morgan (ed.), *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002).
- 16 Immaculada Blasco Herranz, 'Citizenship and Female Catholic Militancy in 1920s Spain', *Gender & History* 19 (2007), pp. 441–66, here p. 443.
 - 17 Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Religion and Feminism in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 27, 29, 36.
 - 18 See Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Carmen Mangion, *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religion in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).
 - 19 Martin Riesbordt and Kelly H. Chong, 'Fundamentalisms and Patriarchal Gender Politics', *Journal of Women's History* 10/4 (1999), pp. 55–77, here p. 58.
 - 20 See e.g., Riesbordt and Chong, 'Fundamentalisms and Patriarchal Gender Politics'; Nikki R. Keddie, 'The New Religious Politics and Women Worldwide: A Comparative Study', *Journal of Women's History* 10/4 (1999), pp. 11–34.
 - 21 See e.g., Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil, Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Nilufer Gole, *The Forbidden Modern: Veiling and Civilisation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Elisabeth Ozdalga, *The Veiling Issue: Official Secularism and Popular Islam in Modern Turkey* (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 1998); Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Marnia Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2008); Alison Donnell (ed.), *The Veil: Postcolonialism and the Politics of Dress*, *Interventions* 1/4 special issue (1999), pp. 489–640.
 - 22 Valentine Moghadam, 'Islamist Movements and Women's Responses in the Middle East', *Gender & History* 3 (1991), pp. 268–86. See also Valentine Moghadam, *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism and the Global Justice Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009); Valentine Moghadam, *Modernising Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), chs 4–7, pp. 113–276; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'Women and Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran: Divorce, Veiling and Emergent Feminist Voices', in Haleh Afshar (ed.), *Women and Politics in the Third World* (London and New York:

Routledge, 1996), pp. 145–73; Nasrin Alavi, *We are Iran* (London: Portobello, 2006), chs 3–5, pp. 91–218; Arzoo Osanloo, *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), chs 3–5, pp. 75–165; Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000; first published as *Etre modern en Iran*, Paris: Karthala, 1998; first tr., London: C. Hurst & Co., 1999), ch. 5, pp. 105–38.

- 23 See Riesbordt and Chong, 'Fundamentalisms and Patriarchal Gender Politics'; Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, 'Fundamentalism and the Family: Gender, Culture and the American Pro-Family Movement', *Journal of Women's History* 10/4 (1999), pp. 5–54. On *sati* (widow burning) see Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Clare Midgley, 'Female Emancipation in an Imperial Frame: English Women and the Campaign against Sati (Widow-Burning) in India, 1813–30', *Women's History Review* 9 (2000), pp. 95–122; Andrea Major, 'The Burning of Sampati Kuer: Sati and the Politics of Imperialism, Nationalism and Revivalism in 1920s India', *Gender & History* 20 (2008), pp. 228–47; Andrea Major, *Sovereignty and Social Reform in India: British Colonialism and the Campaign against Sati, 1830–60* (London: Routledge, 2011).
- 24 Amrita Basu, 'Women's Activism and the Vicissitudes of Hindu Nationalism', *Journal of Women's History* 10/4 (1999), pp. 104–24.
- 25 Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L'Esposito (eds), *Islam, Gender and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), essays by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, 'Islam and Gender: Dilemmas in the Changing Arab World', pp. 3–29, Barbara Stowasser, 'Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation', pp. 30–44, Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Feminism in an Islamic Republic: "Years of Hardship, Years of Growth"', pp. 59–84, Mervat Hatem, 'Secularist and Islamist Discourses on Modernity in Egypt and Evolution of the Postcolonial Nation-State', pp. 85–99; Aynur Ilyasoglu, 'Islamist Women in Turkey', in Zehra Arat (ed.), *Deconstructing Images of 'The Turkish Woman'* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 241–62; Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2009); Lila Abu Lughod, 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Politics', in Lila Abu Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 243–69; Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'Religious Modernists and the "Woman Question"', in Eric Hooglund (ed.), *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Social and Political Change in*

- Iran since 1979* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), pp. 74–95; M. Hermansen, ‘Fatima as a Role Model in “Ali Shari’ati”’, in Guity Nashat (ed.), *Women and Revolution in Iran* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), pp. 87–96; Nayareh Tohidi, *Feminism, Democracy and Islamism in Iran*, in Persian (Los Angeles, Ketabsara, 1996).
- 26 See e.g., Jeffrey Richards, ‘From Christianity to Paganism: The New Middle Ages and the Values of Medieval Masculinity’, *Cultural Values* 3 (1999), pp. 213–34; Patricia H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); John H. Arnold, ‘The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity’, in Anke Bernau, Sarah Salih and Ruth Evans (eds), *Medieval Virginites* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 102–18; Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Elizabeth L’Estrange and Alison More (eds), *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe: Construction, Transformation and Subversion, 600–1530* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Katherine Lewis, ‘Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity in Late Medieval England’, *Gender & History* 24 (2012), pp. 112–33; Andrew Miller, ‘To “Frock” a Cleric: The Gendered Implications of Mutilating Ecclesiastical Vestments in Medieval England’, *Gender & History* 24 (2012), pp. 271–91.
- 27 Yvonne Maria Werner (ed.), *Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011), p. 7.
- 28 George Eliot, *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1858; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 275.
- 29 See D. H. McLeod, ‘Varieties of Anticlericalism in Later Victorian and Edwardian England’, in N. Aston and M. Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism in Britain, c.1500–1914* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001), pp. 198–220.
- 30 See e.g., McDevitt, ‘Muscular Catholicism’; Anna Prestjān, ‘The Man in the Clergyman: Swedish Priest Obituaries’, in Werner (ed.), *Christian Masculinity*, pp. 115–26; Yvonne Maria Werner, ‘Alternative Masculinity? Catholic Missionaries in Scandinavia’, in Werner (ed.), *Christian Masculinity*, pp. 165–88; Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe, 1789–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Tine Van Ossalaer, ‘Christening Masculinity? Catholic Action and Men in Interwar Belgium’, *Gender & History* 21 (2009), pp. 380–401.
- 31 See e.g., John J. MacAloon, ‘Introduction: Muscular Christianity after 150

- Years', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23 (2006), pp. 687–700; Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late 19th Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Doris Jakobsch, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 32 MacAloon, 'Introduction: Muscular Christianity', p. 694; Ikuo Abe, 'Muscular Christianity in Japan: The Growth of a Hybrid', in *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23 (2006), pp. 714–38; Joseph Alter, 'Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46 (2004), pp. 497–534.
- 33 Joseph Alter, 'Yoga at the Fin de Siècle: Muscular Christianity with a "Hindu" Twist', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 2 (2006), pp. 759–76. For earlier Hindu masculinities, see Jarrod L. Whitaker, *Strong Arms and Drinking Strength: Masculinity, Violence and the Body in Ancient India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 34 Alison Falby, 'Buddhist Psychologies and Masculinity in Early Twentieth-Century Britain', in Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan (eds), *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013); Jeffrey J. Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).
- 35 Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 99; See also Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Benjamin Maria Baader, 'Jewish Difference and the Feminine Spirit of Judaism in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Germany', Robin Judd, 'Moral, Clean Men of the Jewish Faith: Jewish Rituals and Their Male Practitioners, 1843–1914', Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, 'A Soft Hero: Male Jewish Identity in Imperial Germany through the Autobiography of Aron Liebeck', in Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman and Paul Lerner (eds), *Jewish Masculinity: German Jews, Gender, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), pp. 50–71, 72–89 and 90–113 respectively; Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism* (London: Routledge, 2007).
- 36 See Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Lara V. Marks, 'Jewish Women and Jewish Prostitution in the East End of London', *Jewish Quarterly* 24 (1982); Lara V. Marks, *Model Mothers: Jewish Mothers and Maternity Provision in East London, 1870–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Rickie Burman, 'Jewish Women

- and the Household Economy in Manchester, c.1880–1920’, in David Cesarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990), pp. 55–75.
- 37 See e.g., Arnold, ‘The Labour of Continence’; Jacqueline Murray, ‘One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders’ and Ruth Mazo Karras, ‘Thomas Aquinas’s Chastity Belt: Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe’, both in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (eds), *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 34–51 and 52–67 respectively; Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth Century Cistercian Writing’, in Constance Hoffman Berman (ed.), *Medieval Religion: New Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 18–43; Cullum and Lewis (eds), *Holiness and Masculinity*, especially the pieces by Jacqueline Murray, ‘Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity’, pp. 24–42, Carolyn Diskant Muir, ‘Bride or Bridegroom? Masculine Identity in Mystic Marriages’, pp. 58–78, Shaun Tougher, ‘Holy Eunuchs! Masculinity and Eunuch Saints in Byzantium’, pp. 93–108, Dawn Marie Hayes, ‘Construction of Holiness and Masculinity at the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis in the Later Middle Ages’, pp. 127–42 and Robert Mills, ‘The Signification of the Tonsure’, pp. 109–26; Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (ed.), *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010); Colleen Conway, *Ecce Homo: Jesus and Graeco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 38 See Erin Bell, ‘The Early Quakers, the Peace Testimony and Masculinity in England, 1660–1720’, *Gender & History* 23 (2011), pp. 283–300; Sara Patterson, ‘Mormon Masculinity: Changing Gender Expectations in the Era of Transition from Polygamy to Monogamy, 1890–1920’, *Gender & History* 23 (2011), pp. 72–91.
- 39 Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker (eds), ‘Gender, Change and Periodisation’, *Gender & History* 20 (2008), pp. 453–62.
- 40 See e.g., Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001) and the debates it engendered in Jeremy Morris, ‘The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularization Debate’, *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), pp. 963–76.
- 41 Callum G. Brown, ‘The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s Have Done to the Study of Religious History’, in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (eds), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 29–46, here p. 36.

- 42 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Tanika Sarkar, 'A Prehistory of Rights: The Age of Consent Debate in Colonial Bengal', *Feminist Studies* 26 (2000), pp. 601–22; Padma Anagol, 'The Age of Consent Act Reconsidered', *South Asia Research* 12 (1992), pp. 100–18; Veena Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance: The Courtesans of Lucknow', in Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (eds), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Relations in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 23–61; Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.
- 43 Daniel J. R. Grey, 'Creating the "Problem Hindu": Sati, Thuggee and Female Infanticide in India, 1800–1860', this volume, pp. 104–106.
- 44 Clare Midgley, 'Liberal Religion and the "Woman Question" between East and West: Perspectives from a Nineteenth-Century Bengali Women's Journal', this volume, pp. 51–66.
- 45 For this perspective, see Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Antoinette Burton, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, and Teaching British Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), chs 7–11, pp. 106–213; Clare Midgley, 'Bringing the Empire Home: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790s–1930s' and Jane Rendall, 'The Condition of Women, Women's Writing and the Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain', both in Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (eds), *At Home with the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 230–50 and 101–21 respectively; Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain 1790–1865* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007).
- 46 Carolyn E. Watson, 'Witches, Priests and Sacred Manoeuvres: (De)stabilising Gender and Sexuality in a Cuban Religion of African Origin', this volume, pp. 31–50.
- 47 Yuet Keung Lo, 'Indeterminacy in Meaning: Religious Syncretism and Dynastic Historiography in the *Shannuren zhuan*', this volume, pp. 67–82.
- 48 Kathleen M. MacIntyre, '"All of their Customs are Daughters of their Religion": Baptists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s-present', this volume, pp. 83–103.
- 49 See e.g., the *Gender & History* special issues of 1997 ('Gender and the Body in Mediterranean Antiquity') and 2004 ('Violence, Vulnerability and Embodiment'). A recent overview of major themes and approaches is Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (eds), *The Routledge History of Sex and*

the Body, 1500 to the Present (London: Routledge, 2013).

- 50 Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 169.
- 51 See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Sarah Coakley, *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 52 Canning, *Gender History in Practice*, p. 179.
- 53 Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura, 'Engendering Purity and Impurity in Assyriological Studies: A Historiographical Overview', this volume, pp. 119–34.
- 54 Anne E. Bailey, 'Lamentation Motifs in Medieval Hagiography', this volume, pp. 135–49.
- 55 See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*.
- 56 Michelle M. Sauer, 'Architecture of Desire: Mediating the Female Gaze in the Medieval English Anchorhold', this volume, pp. 150–69.
- 57 Maya Corry, 'The Alluring Beauty of the Leonardesque Ideal: Masculinity and Spirituality in Renaissance Milan', this volume, pp. 170–94.
- 58 Esme Cleall, "'Deaf to the Word": Gender, Deafness and Protestantism in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland', this volume, pp. 195–208.
- 59 Cleall, 'Deaf to the Word'.
- 60 See Dagmar Herzog, 'Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures', *American Historical Review* 114 (2009), pp. 1287–308; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2008); Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2008); H. G. Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality', in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds), *The Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 157–79; Timothy Willem Jones, *Sexual Politics in the Church of England, 1857–1957* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: Personal Relationships in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003); Dixon, *Divine Feminine*; Sue Morgan, 'Sex and Common-Sense: Maude Royden, Religion, and

- 61 See Joy Dixon, 'Out of your clinging kisses...I create a new world': Sexuality and Spirituality in the Work of Edward Carpenter', in Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Wilburn (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (London: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 143–64; Timothy Jones, 'The Stained Glass Closet: Celibacy and Homosexuality in the Church of England to 1955', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20 (2011), pp. 132–52; Matthew Grimley, 'Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60 (2009), pp. 725–41; Sue Morgan, '"The Word made flesh": Women, Religion and Sexual Cultures', in Morgan and deVries (eds), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures*, pp. 159–87.
- 62 Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*; Callum G. Brown, 'Sex, Religion and the Single Woman c.1950–1975: The Importance of a 'Short' Sexual Revolution to the English Religious Crisis of the Sixties', *Twentieth Century British History* 22 (2011), pp. 189–215; Callum G. Brown, 'Gendering Secularisation: Locating Women in the Transformation of British Christianity in the 1960s', in Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds), *Religion and the Political Imagination* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 275–94.
- 63 Zubin Mistry, 'The Sexual Shame of the Chaste: "Abortion Miracles" in Early Medieval Saints' Lives', this volume, pp. 211–24.
- 64 Pat Cullum, '"Give me Chastity": Masculinity and Attitudes to Chastity and Celibacy in the Middle Ages', this volume, pp. 225–40.
- 65 See Joseph S. Alter, 'Body, Text, Nation: Writing the Fit Body in Post-Colonial India', in Satadru Sen (ed.), *Confronting the Body: Essays on Physicality in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (London and New York: Anthem, 2004), pp. 16–38; Joseph S. Alter, 'Ayurveda and Sexuality: Sex, Sex Therapy, and the "Paradox of Virility"', in Dagmar Wujastyk and Frederick Smith (eds), *Modern and Global Ayurveda: Pluralism and Paradigms* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), pp. 177–201.
- 66 Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 264. For the social and political roles of devout single women, see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (London: Routledge, 1985); Eileen Yeo, *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Carmen Mangion, *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth-Century*

- 67 Cocks, 'Religion and Sexuality', p. 158. In the history of male homosexuality, for example, scholars have explored in detail the contiguity between Roman and Anglo-Catholic aestheticism and male homoerotic sensibilities. See David Hilliard, 'Un-English and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality', *Victorian Studies* 25 (1982), pp. 181–210; Frederick Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996); Jones 'Stained Glass Closet', p. 151; Joy Dixon, 'Out of your clinging kisses'.
- 68 Susan Gane, 'Common Soldiers, Same-Sex Love, and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century British Army', this volume, pp. 241–55.
- 69 Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Other Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- 70 Anna Clark, 'Twilight Moments', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14 (2005), pp. 139–58.
- 71 Joy Dixon, "Dark Ecstasies": Sex, Mysticism and Psychology in Early Twentieth-Century England', this volume pp. 256–71.
- 72 Mary Vincent, 'Made Flesh? Gender, Doctrine and Religious Violence in Twentieth Century Spain', this volume, pp. 272–84.
- 73 Dagmar Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- 74 See Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of Aisha bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge 1994); Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 75 Wilson Chacko Jacob, 'Conversion Trouble: The Alawis of Hadhramawt, Empire, Gender and the Problem of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century South India, this volume, pp. 287–303.
- 76 Effi Gazi, "'Fatherland, Religion, Family": Exploring the History of a Slogan in Greece', this volume, pp. 304–14.
- 77 Rina Verma Williams, 'The More Things Change: Debating Gender and Religion in India's Hindu Laws, 1920–2006', this volume, pp. 315–28.
- 78 See e.g., Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New

- Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*.
- 79 Laura Schwartz, 'Women, Religion and Agency in Modern British History: Review Article', *Women's History Review* 21 (2012), pp. 317–23.
- 80 Jurgen Habermas, 'Notes on a Post-Secular Society', *Sign and Sight*, 18 June 2008, available at, <www.signandsight.com/features.1714.html>. See also Charles Taylor's influential *The Secular Age* (Cambridge: MA: Belknap Press, 2007); Alan Megill, 'History, Theoreticism, and the Limits of "The Postsecular"', *History and Theory* 52 (February 2013), pp. 110–29. Thanks to Mark Mason for some stimulating discussions here.
- 81 Callum G. Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 1–28; Jeffrey L. Cox, 'Master Narratives of Long Term Religious Change', in McLeod and Ustorf (eds), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe*, pp. 201–17; Jeffrey L. Cox, 'Provincializing Christendom: The Case of Great Britain', *Church History* 75 (2006), pp. 120–30. See also in the same issue, Thomas Albert Howard, 'A "Religious Turn" in Modern European Historiography?' *Church History* 75 (2006), pp. 157–162; Thomas Kselman, 'Challenging DeChristianization: The Historiography of Religion in Modern France', *Church History* 75 (2006), pp. 130–39.
- 82 Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution*; Callum G. Brown, 'Men Losing Faith: The Making of Modern No-Religionism in the UK, 1939–2010', in Delap and Morgan (eds), *Men, Masculinity and Religious Change*, pp. 301–25.
- 83 Timothy W. Jones, 'Postsecular Sex? Secularisation and Religious Change in the History of Sexuality in Britain', *History Compass* (forthcoming, 2013).
- 84 See e.g., Joanna de Groot, *Religion, Culture and Politics in Iran: From the Qajars to Khomeini* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), pp. 2–7, 94–5, 123–5, 140, 167–81, 195, 205–7, 249–52, 253–8; Nahid Yeganeh and Nikki R. Keddie 'Sexuality and Shi'i Social Protest', in Juan R. I. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie (eds), *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 108–36; Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Zehra F. Arat (ed.), *Deconstructing Images of 'The Turkish Woman'*; Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 85 Michael Gilsenan, 'Islam and Politics', special issue of *MERIP (Middle*

East Research and Information Project) 102 (January 1982), p. 30. See also Reinhold Loeffler, *Islam in Practice* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1988), pp. 1–4, 245–83; Erika Friedl, *Women of Deh Koh* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), pp. 1053–75; Jeanne Boydston, 'Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis', *Gender & History* 20 (2008), pp. 558–83; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 'African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race', *Signs* 17 (1992), pp. 251–74; Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?', *Journal of Women's History* 16 (2006), pp. 11–21.

PART I

Crossing Cultures and Transnational Exchanges

Witches, Female Priests and Sacred Manoeuvres: (De)Stabilising Gender and Sexuality in a Cuban Religion of African Origin

Carolyn E. Watson

Following independence from Spain in 1898, Cuban elites increasingly became concerned with the large minority of African and African descended people suddenly declared equal under the law and through a powerful discourse of racial democracy.¹ Accusing black Cubans of being ill prepared for such modern responsibilities as citizenship, they blamed Spanish colonialism and slavery for the atavistic African practices that had accompanied the founding of the nation. While this ‘cultural backwardness’ had many expressions, one of the most insidious was the variety of religious practices collectively referred to as *brujería*, or witchcraft. Noise and hygiene were among the most oft articulated threats to morality, but underlying these anxieties was the distressing conviction that witches and warlocks used their cultural practices to encourage and provide a haven for ‘sexual vices’.² Intellectuals created a framework for evaluating and legislating against such activity throughout most of the century, recommending police repression and social condemnation as the most effective means of curing the national body of its affliction.

Although framed as attempts to understand African religions, racist treatises on these traditions produced of some of the most enduring affronts to these traditions that adherents have only recently begun to challenge and overcome.³ Focusing on the Yoruba religious complex known as Regla de Ocha-Ifá, this article demonstrates that adherents to these religions were aware of these interpretive snares and used them to manoeuvre through elite censure and sacred mythology.⁴ Performative reinterpretations of Ocha-Ifá reflecting deliberate, gendered strategising aimed at reducing and assuaging the repressive measures of the state are indicative of the acuity with which adepts were able to assess distinct sociopolitical contexts and reconceptualise their beliefs and tenets to overcome them. In this endeavour, Ifá and one *babalawo* in particular, Víctor Betancourt, appropriated and accommodated these pervasive racial and gender stereotypes to strengthen the position of Ifá in Cuban society.

Ocha-Ifá: African roots, Cuban praxis

Ocha-Ifá arrived in Cuba from West Africa via the nineteenth-century slave trade. Religious praxis was, and continues to be, based on an elaborate series of orally transmitted myths and proverbs that prescribe, prohibit and rationalise behaviour and distinct levels of participation in both religious and secular life. A religious complex concerned with solving the problems of the present, Ocha-Ifá entails direct and indirect divination via the *orishas*, or deities linked to the powers of nature, which control human destiny. Indirect divination involves interpreting patterns of pieces of coconut, palm nuts or metal disks as they are tossed onto a mat as the *orisha's* message. Direct divination occurs through spirit possession of a medium. Only Ocha employs this method of divination, which is often described through the analogy of horse and rider.⁵ Originally practised only by non-whites, by the late twentieth century Ocha-Ifá counted a significant number of white Cubans among its adherents.

In exchange for guiding and protecting humans from danger, the *orishas* demand worship and offerings.⁶ Worship may take many forms such as dressing in the colours representing a particular deity, caring for sacred objects, greeting the material representation of the *orisha*, and holding drumming ceremonies. Offerings, however, are foods specific to each deity and always involve the sacrifice of an animal and the spilling of its blood, both of which are believed to reinvigorate the *orisha* and its power.

Gender played a central role in organising and defining praxis throughout the twentieth century, although research is only beginning to address its significance.⁷ Nonetheless, analyses of nineteenth-century Yoruba sociopolitical organisation in West Africa have offered some insight into gendered ritual relationships in Cuban praxis. Anthropologist J. Lorand Matory argues that gender was the paradigm of all relationships among eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Yoruba.⁸ Sociologist Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí argues, in contrast, that gender did not exist in the pre-colonial Òyó Empire and that hierarchy and sociopolitical power were based exclusively on seniority.⁹ Both of these scholars caution against universalising analyses of gender and, perhaps more importantly, contend that the Yoruba understood gender as being much more fluid and complex than western, colonising cultures could comprehend.

It was not uncommon in nineteenth-century Yorubaland for men to assume some roles identified as female, especially as possession priests of certain *orishas*, or for women to assume more masculine roles, such as hunters.¹⁰ This behaviour did not provoke social disapproval, but individuals usually cross-dressed, adopting the cultural genitals of the opposite sex in order to perform the gender corresponding to their public activities.¹¹ In Cuba, cross gender behaviour and cross dressing was punishable by law.¹² Rather than

discarding Yoruba gender metaphors for social organisation, therefore, practitioners wove them into religious praxis so that the *orisha*, not the medium, contravened certain comportments, thereby subverting Cuban gender identities that were believed to follow naturally from anatomical sex.

Networks of fictive kinship forged through initiation into the religion preserved several aspects of Yoruba social life. The ritually experienced who trained a novice in *orisha* worship became the individual's *padrinos*, or godparents. And while the newly initiated person was considered their *ahijado(a)*, or godchild, s/he was also considered the *iyáwò*, or bride, of the *orisha* to whom s/he was initiated. '*Iyáwò*' was recoded to mean 'child' in contemporary Cuba, but its origin reveals the relationship between practitioners and *orishas*. Speculation has led researchers to argue that as the bride, all new initiates were gendered female in relationship to their divine husbands who could have been male or female *orishas* that spiritually penetrated their human 'mounts' during possession. The husband-bride relationship in this argument represents metaphorical copulation.¹³

Following certain elements of Oyèwùmí's argument, however, the concept of *iyáwò* suggests that the husband-bride relationship represented an insider-outsider relationship through which each party exercised certain obligations and responsibilities. Brides, in virilocal marriages, were always outsiders in their husbands' families, but insiders in their own.¹⁴ In Cuba, as the *iyáwò* status lasted only a short period following initiation and incorporation into a religious family, the relationship was more likely to have been constructed around the fictive kin group, and unrelated to copulation. After fulfilling certain initiatory criteria within a defined period of time, an individual became an insider and was no longer referred to as *iyáwò* but as a full member of the religious family, which was organised hierarchically based on number of years initiated in the religion. Status was acquired over time.

Recoding notwithstanding, *orisha* worship both in Africa and Cuba centred on establishing and maintaining control over the material world via the spiritual. Possession by an *orisha*, therefore, put an individual in direct contact with an entity that could advise on personal, social and political matters. Mediums behaved like the *orisha* in possession of their bodies and often conducted themselves in ways that western observers described as sexual. Many *orishas*, for example, were connected to fertility, which was equated with political and social stability, as well as human and agricultural reproduction. Religious festivals generally took place in these symbolic contexts.¹⁵ Oyèwùmí has demonstrated that certain concepts, such as fatherhood, were also symbolically rather than sexually produced. She explains that biological contribution to conception of a child was unnecessary for men to become fathers; rather, marriage to the biological mother of the child and public declarations of paternity established fatherhood and perpetuated the lineage.¹⁶ As in ceremonies designed to stabilise and perpetuate social relations, sex and

sexuality, in western conceptualisation of the terms, had little to do with procreation or reproduction. The opposite was true in Cuban society, where sexuality was considered sinful and immoral and could only be sanctified through marriage for the purpose of procreation.¹⁷

In spite of these significant gender differences between the Yoruba and Cubans, colonial authorities in Cuba initially concerned themselves with the potential for rebellion that African religions represented, rather than their sexuality, although Spain periodically manipulated the image of black men raping white women as a means to maintain gender, class and racial divisions to thwart independence movements.¹⁸ Although permitted on Sundays and holidays, colonial authorities limited observance of African traditions to the *cabildos de nación*, small, legally inscribed religious chapters under the supervision of the Catholic Church that restricted membership to Africans of the same ethnicity as a way to maintain ethnic tensions and reduce the likelihood of unified rebellions. The Spanish hoped that, under the tutelage of the Church, Africans would become more Catholic; however, feeble efforts at catechisation and the demands of a plantation society limited the impact of the Church.¹⁹ Nonetheless, slaves practised their religious traditions during the little free time they had, with periodic repression or control from the plantation owners throughout the colonial period.²⁰

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as abolition became inevitable, the Spanish crown attempted to abolish the *cabildos* and replace them with mutual aid societies that would better serve the needs of a society based on free, rather than slave, labour. Many simply renamed their *cabildos* and began to admit other African ethnic groups and their descendants, while maintaining the basic character of a religious entity.²¹ In both cases, slaves and free blacks hosting religious celebrations in their homes had to request permission to do so and were kept under surveillance. Non-participants in these festivities repeatedly lodged complaints with authorities concerning noise and large gatherings of people in the street late at night, with varying degrees of success in enforcing the peace.²² While these grievances served to intensify racial divisions in society by characterising African cultural practices as raucous and disorganised, they had yet to reorient the focus of aggression to sexual morality. Republican authorities maintained this policy of scrutinising African religious activities after independence from Spain in 1898, referring to these practices, and a number of popular beliefs and superstitions of European origin, as witchcraft.

Witches, warlocks and the spectre of history

In late 1904, however, the murder of a white toddler named Zoila near the city of Havana radically altered public perception of witchcraft. Two black men were accused of killing the child and extracting her heart to heal the ailing

children of a black woman.²³ The crime sections of Havana newspapers had regularly reported on witchcraft until this time, providing details of the alleged offences and the parties involved. Witchcraft itself, however, was not a crime; the transgression emerged from the relationship between the witch or warlock and the client and frequently revolved around fraudulent charms or spells.²⁴ This time, in addition to connecting witchcraft to murder, newspapers also proffered opinions concerning the role of slavery in creating such an 'ignorant' and 'savage' persona, instantly transforming adherents to African-derived religions into criminals.²⁵ While this characterisation of black men as cannibals in search of white children served primarily to repress lower-class Africans and their descendants with little or no formal education, defaming African culture helped to justify the inferior position of all non-whites in Cuban society.²⁶

Following the execution of the accused in Zoila's murder, a young lawyer published a criminological study of one of the condemned warlocks. Fernando Ortiz's *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujos (Apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal)* [Afro-Cuban Underworld: The Black Warlocks. Notes for a Study of Criminal Ethnology] further stigmatised practitioners of African religions by arguing that, although the murder of Zoila was an exceptional case, warlocks were nonetheless immoral, delinquent conmen who should be confined to penal colonies where they would be isolated from other prisoners to avoid provoking the degeneration of criminals who could be otherwise rehabilitated.²⁷ Not only considered dangerous to society as a whole, unlike other convicts, the warlocks could not overcome their alleged intrinsic condition. This characterisation of witchcraft as a contagious pathology served to tarnish the image of black men by providing the ruling elite with the sense of moral and cultural superiority it needed to obstruct their social and political aspirations.²⁸

While *Hampa afro-cubana* sought to identify black men as criminals and as menacing threats to bourgeois republican order, it also employed sexuality to further stigmatise and oppress the population of African descent, making women complicit in its degeneration. Just as black warlocks had emerged in Cuban society, Ortiz affirmed, black witches could be found, although they were much fewer in number than warlocks and occupied secondary religious roles because, as in Africa, women were subordinated to men.²⁹ In their relationships, he continued, warlocks and witches were 'exceedingly lascivious' and the source of all types of criminal sexual behaviour including polygamy, prostitution, sexual corruption and abortion.³⁰ This list of activities that Ortiz attributed to African witchcraft corresponded to European notions of witches consorting with the devil to inflict harm on individuals and society.³¹ Europeans, however, usually accused women of possessing and wielding this type of power, so it is significant that Ortiz identified it as primarily the purview of African men.

Stigmatising all African religious celebrations as orgies, Ortiz offered as proof graphic descriptions of naked female bodies writhing in ecstasy to the frenzied beat of African drums.³² In addition to linking witches and warlocks to diverse sexual offences, the hystericised bodies and images of unconventional sex served to gender practitioners of African religions as morally repugnant sexual deviants. *Hampa afro-cubana* sexualised African women, denying them womanhood and other attributes of motherhood that Cuban society demanded of women.³³ The resulting impact of the book was to classify African religions and their adherents as transgressors of white bourgeois social, sexual and gender boundaries that idealised monogamy, marriage, sexual honour and motherhood.³⁴

The Cuban state never implemented Ortiz's recommendation of imprisoning and segregating warlocks, but *Hampa afro-cubana* did provide the ideological basis for legislation aimed at repressing African cultural expressions. Between 1906 and 1920, several municipal governments issued ordinances banning drumming, street processions and carnival groups, in which participants 'perform[ed] contortions with their bodies that [we]re offensive to morality'.³⁵ Municipal and secret police detected and raided the homes of adherents to these religions and confiscated sacred objects in an effort to eliminate their practice. White authorities subjected black men and women to legal proceedings to determine the intention of their activities, prying into the minutiae of their intimate lives in the process.³⁶ Although very few trials resulted in convictions, the devout were vulnerable to constant surveillance and arbitrary arrest for most of the twentieth century.

Ocha-Ifá not only survived these frequent assaults, it began to spread to other regions of the country and attract more followers, even among the white population, yet Cuban authorities did not generally distinguish one religion from the other, referring to and treating all as witchcraft. Adherents reinterpreted sacred myths and modified their religious praxis as a response to these threats to their wellbeing and to ensure the continuation of their traditions. The re-identification of *cabildos* as mutual aid and recreational societies was the primary vehicle for this ritual reorganisation and dissemination of Ocha-Ifá, demonstrating the tenacity of adherents to protect and preserve their traditions. Where, in 1898, individual practitioners of Yoruba traditions had only worshipped the *orisha* to which they had been initiated, by 1920, they worshipped all twenty-four that had survived in Cuba and began calling their religion the Regla de Ocha (rule of the *orishas*) and the Regla de Ifá (rule of Ifá).³⁷

Lest we assume this amalgamation of cults was a peaceful and unanimous decision among *orisha* devotees, it is essential to note that the process was fraught with tensions based on ethnic variations in practice as well as gender. One well-known Changó (*orisha* of thunder and lightning) priestess of Òyò Yoruba traditions, Latuán, who arrived in Cuba through Matanzas in 1863, a

date that has led some to believe she was smuggled onto the island, was able to access the Ogún (*orisha* of war) cult, a non-possession *orisha* under the domain of men from Ibadan, only by threatening to exclude them from her religious community if they refused.³⁸ Ogún was recognised in the royal city of Oyo, but not venerated as he had been in Ibadan; therefore, Latuán lacked both the knowledge and skills necessary for his worship.³⁹ The men acceded to her demands, and since then Ogún has been an *orisha* that possesses his initiates in Cuba, while in Nigeria he has remained a non-possession *orisha*. This anecdote not only illustrates conscious and strategic ritual manoeuvres, it also demonstrates the complexities of religious power as they arrived and played out in the Cuban context. Religious authority was not the exclusive domain of men – women wielded considerable power, especially where spirit-possession was concerned, and were protagonists in the modification of some of the fundamental ritual precepts. Significantly, only the possession *orishas* survived the changes to Ocha in the twentieth century.

Babalawos, or male priests of Ifá, also subjected Ifá to these sacred manoeuvres through affective relationships with influential female possession priestesses during this period, which enabled them to assume some of the ritual roles women had once dominated.⁴⁰ By the 1930s, these men began providing divination assistance to Ocha houses, creating greater proximity between the two traditions.⁴¹ As this new relationship between Ocha and Ifá was much stronger in the capital and province of Havana than regions like Matanzas, it may have resulted from the intense, long-term persecution in that city. Ifá, however, continued to recognise as many as 200 *orishas*, although *babalawos* were only ever initiated to one – Orula or Orúnmila – who does not possess his adepts. *Babalawos* emphasised this fact as part of a strategy to bring Ocha under greater authority of Ifá.

Ifá employs direct divination only via an oracle. While this practice was still viewed as witchcraft or magic similar to reading tea leaves, Cubans did not initially equate it with sexual deviance because it did not involve spirit possession. Once Cubans began to recognise differences between practices in the 1930s, therefore, Ifá managed to distance itself somewhat from this stain. The length of time it took to educate and train a *babalawo* also made the office a highly selective and closely guarded fraternity of men during this period and it remained reasonably so until the 1960s and 1970s.⁴² Moreover, Europeans and Cubans generally compared *babalawos* to Christian priests, leading to the creation of a (false) religious hierarchy in which Ifá occupied the summit.⁴³ All of these factors that elevated and rationalised Ifá were based on nineteenth-century western and Christian notions of men's and women's roles and behaviour that identified education, sobriety, philosophy, priesthood and maleness as the norm in religion, where lack of education, spirit-possession and femaleness were seen as abnormal and downright deviant. *Babalawos* readily accepted these concepts and perpetuated them

through their contact with scholars, internalising and emphasising these distinctions for their own purposes.⁴⁴

The 1959 Revolution presented a new set of challenges for practitioners of religions of African origin. In an effort to distance Cuba from both Spanish and American political and cultural domination, intellectuals heralded adherents of religions of African origin as the bearers of an autochthonous Cuban culture, forged through the blending of African and European traditions.⁴⁵ Rituals acquired artistic value and intellectuals employed adepts, primarily of Ocha-Ifá, as dancers and musicians who joined the *Conjunto Folklórico Nacional* (National Folkloric Ensemble) in the early 1960s to take Ocha-Ifá on world tours.⁴⁶ Choreographers minimised or concealed the alleged sexually explicit gestures adherents exhibited while performing their religion, although the revolution's concern with overthrowing the bourgeoisie and its obsession with morality permitted a degree of tolerance not often witnessed in the past.⁴⁷ Through the performance of religions of African origin, the Revolution incorporated adherents into new projects of national identity and exposed broader society to a religion it had learned to fear. Moreover, white Cubans increasingly were among the new initiates to Ocha-Ifá, in spite of the conviction of some African descendants that they were appropriating African culture.⁴⁸

Conversely, the new government also censured Ocha-Ifá. Pre-revolutionary ideologies characterising Ocha-Ifá as witchcraft and avatars of slavery, compounded by dogma inherited from the Soviet Union concerning religion in general, continued to stigmatise practitioners as superstitious and backward anomalies of an otherwise modern society. By the late 1960s, these two trends coalesced into an anonymously authored book originating with the Cuban Communist Party titled *Sectas religiosas* (Religious Sects) that accused practitioners of using 'their religion to satisfy their sexual appetites and aberrations'.⁴⁹ This taxonomy was not new, although the insistence that Ocha-Ifá served as 'a haven for homosexuals, prostitutes and those too lazy to work (*vagos*)' was.⁵⁰ If male practitioners had not quite shed their image as warlocks capable of committing horrifying crimes, their representation as 'exceedingly lascivious' was suddenly inverted to gender them potential counter-revolutionaries.⁵¹

A chimera allegedly responsible for all types of contraventions against society, in the 1960s the Cuban State associated homosexuality with the prostitution, American gangsters and corruption that characterised the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.⁵² Men not expressing the appropriate revolutionary sentiment ran the risk of being labelled homosexual, whether or not they engaged in same-sex sex. Women's sexuality had traditionally been ignored; therefore, persecution of female homosexuals was much less common and dealt with in more paternalistic ways than that of men.⁵³ In the case of religions of African origin, their discursive association with

criminality and vice meant that they were already marginalised. But characterisations of crime and vice as counter-revolutionary activities further contributed to stigmatising practitioners of these religions as transgressors of multiple boundaries. Where revolutionary stereotypes served to divide society according to support for the revolution, they continued to employ race, or cultural practices associated with it, thereby marginalising and discrediting a significant portion of the population. These public and private practices enabled cultural racism to thrive, even as the Revolution succeeded in eliminating the social inequality and glass ceilings that had previously impeded the social mobility of non-whites.⁵⁴

Same-sex sex has existed throughout Cuban history, as have varying degrees of tolerance and persecution, and practitioners of Ocha-Ifá recognised different sexual practices among members of the same sex, without necessarily inferring a social stigma onto the individual. In the 1950s, Cuban ethnographer Lydia Cabrera documented at least five different Yoruba terms that her informants used for women who engaged in same-sex sex, and three for men.⁵⁵ Her research subjects also suggested that certain *orishas* preferred initiates with specific sexual inclinations, although the gender of the *orisha* did not necessarily correspond to that of the devotee.⁵⁶ Taboos and myths concerning the source of the *orisha's* power were the determining factors in choosing one's tutelary *orisha*, demonstrating that sexual orientation was a less important aspect of a practitioner's personal life than his or her ability to observe certain rules and regulations concerning *orisha* worship.

Developments in Ocha-Ifá since the 1960s, however, have responded to the conditions imposed by the Cuban Revolution. In order to avoid being labelled homosexuals, *babalawos* have publicly and openly professed their heterosexuality, refusing to initiate men who are, or may appear to be, homosexual. A number of *babalawos* refuse to initiate men to Ifá if previously possessed by their tutelary *orisha* in Ocha. As twentieth-century Cuban culture has determined that only women should be penetrated, both sexually and spiritually, men accepting spirit-possession run the risk of calling into question their sexual orientation.⁵⁷ True *babalawos*, like revolutionaries, must be heterosexual.

Yet, these contradictory policies concerning religions of African origin created the conditions in which Ocha-Ifá not only survived but flourished. If the religion indulged sexual aberrations, it also fulfilled the revolutionary goal of showcasing Cuban culture, much of which identified in some way with the island's African heritage. Additionally, Cuban internationalism, a strategy designed to forge political and cultural bonds with developing countries, facilitated exchanges between Cuba and African countries, enabling many adherents to learn new or different ritual practices.⁵⁸ Among these practices that began to gain popularity in the mid-1980s was the initiation of women to Ifá, or Iyáonifá in its Cuban form.⁵⁹

The Egbe Gèlèdè: contemporary manoeuvres in gender, sexuality and the sacred

Babalawo Victor Betancourt was initiated to Ifá in 1985 after participating in Palo Monte (a Bantu religion) and Ocha for more than thirty years. Through experience, he had realised that women in Ocha-Ifá possessed as much ritual knowledge as men; even concerning rituals in which gender restricted their participation.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Betancourt identified domestic slavery and Cuban machismo as responsible for relegating women to the kitchen in the nineteenth century. Their qualification as cooks and cleaners had been absorbed into the religion during the republican period.⁶¹ Betancourt aimed to expand the role of women in Ifá and rewrite the history of the religion in Cuba as one in which gender roles appeared far less circumscribed than they were by the 1990s. He also sought to use symbols and imagery of the past to judge and comment on race in late twentieth-century Cuban society.

Research of his religious heritage led Betancourt to believe that equally capable and respected female diviners of Ifá had arrived in Cuba as slaves.⁶² Several women, he argued, such as Ma Monserrat González, Fermina Gómez, Latuán and María Towá, were known for their divination skills and had enjoyed prestige as a result of their extensive knowledge of the *odús* (myths) of Ifá. These women were so influential that *babalawos* heeded their advice. Furthermore, it was a former female Yoruba slave who gave the first ritual power of Ifá to a Cuban *babalawo*.⁶³ While not all practitioners agree that women arrived in Cuba as initiates to Ifá, the majority recognise the power, influence and reputation of the women Betancourt cited to support *Iyáonifá*.

After 1959, the Cuban state still expected women to form nuclear families and become mothers, even if they did not marry, but it also expected them to contribute to building socialism, a task that required their labour at all levels of the workforce.⁶⁴ The establishment of daycare centres, cafeterias and laundries helped to reduce women's workload, although a continued focus on changing women's behaviour made changing men more difficult. Nonetheless, in spite of their under-representation in high levels of government and other sectors, women had made enormous gains by the 1980s, entering all areas of the workforce and even outnumbering men in some of the more traditionally male occupations.⁶⁵ This process, however, had required some skilful manoeuvring in service of the revolution and, in a similar fashion, Betancourt had to do the same.⁶⁶ Overturning pre-revolutionary idealisations of gender roles in the workplace, if not the home, forced at least some practitioners of Ocha-Ifá to reflect on equitable religious praxis.

Betancourt's study of Yoruba texts, both on the history of Ifá in West Africa and the *odús* that contain prohibitions against initiating women revealed that, although several myths criticised the involvement of women in Ifá, only one, *Ireté Ogbé*, had been employed to justify their exclusion.⁶⁷ In this myth the

supreme Yoruba deity Olodumaré invests the *orisha* Odú with great powers:

Upon being called to earth by the *awos* (diviners), Olodúmare gave Odú a bird and told her that it would go anywhere she wanted it to and do anything she wanted it to do. She named it Aragamago, put it in a calabash and said that no one else could look at it. Those who looked at the bird would be blinded. The *awos* consulted Ifá [considered separate from Odú] who recommended that Orúnmila make an offering to the earth so that he could marry Odú. She let Aragamago out of the calabash to eat the offering. Odú then told Orúnmila that she had tremendous powers but did not wish to fight him. She would share her power with him if he obeyed her taboo – his wives could not look upon her face. Additionally, the one initiated to Ifá will not be allowed to suffer.⁶⁸

This myth reveals the origin of Ifá and the source of Orúnmila's power – marriage to Odú. The calabash and the bird appear as symbols of spiritual power and the power of female deities is usually contained in some form of calabash.⁶⁹ Birds are potent messengers associated mainly with two *orishas* – Orúnmila, the medium between Odú and the *babalawo*, and Osaín, the deity of herbs and cures. Birds are also routinely passed over the body of an initiate to cleanse it of negative elements or are offered in sacrifice to the *orishas* in exchange for their assistance with a minor problem. The bird in the calabash symbolises the female power of Odú and its consumption of the offering acceptance of the pact between Odú and Orúnmila. Female power is often viewed as polluting or destabilising, but thus contained or controlled Odú's potential became available for Orúnmila's use.⁷⁰

Most Cuban *babalawos* have interpreted Odú's taboo against Orúnmila's wives looking upon her face as traditional justification for prohibiting the initiation of women to Ifá. As the interpreters of the oracle, *babalawos* are equated with Orúnmila. Odú communicates via the oracle. Complete ritual fabrication of myths would put both the adherent and the religion at risk; however, alternative meanings of many *odús* have always been present in Cuban praxis, although practitioners identify them as incorrect or corrupted. Rather than challenge conventions, Victor Betancourt reinterpreted the myth as meaning that women could not look at the oracle.⁷¹ Looking at the oracle may or may not be relevant to working with Ifá and this issue will be discussed in the following section. More salient for the moment is Odú's reassurance that those who joined her would not be harmed. And to join Odú, Betancourt determined that women would have to become insiders, or witches.

As in Cuba, witches existed in Yoruba culture. Unlike in Cuba, only women practised witchcraft and they were generally believed to have control over life and death in a very broad sense. These usually post-menopausal women joined Egbe Gèlèdè, or societies of witches, from which they exercised their

power. The term witch, however, is misleading because the Yoruba word for witch, *ajé*, does not imply malevolence. Their actions are more closely related to reproduction, fertility and political stability. The *ajés* can impact these aspects of human life in both positive and negative ways that are not always interpreted as life or death.⁷²

In Yorubaland, men dedicated themselves to honouring these powerful women during times of social or political strife in order to appease and control their potentially destructive behaviour, convincing them to focus on life-giving activities. They donned women's attire and elaborate wooden masks representing birds or women's faces and entertained the *ajés* by dancing in annual masquerade ceremonies.⁷³ These ceremonies continued well into the twentieth century among some Yoruba.⁷⁴

Founded in Havana in 1998, the Cuban Egbe Gèlèdè is based on the Gèlèdè from the Yoruba city of Ketú, where the practice originated. Worship centred on the feminine power, Igba Iwa, or Iyamí, known as the beginning and end of all life.⁷⁵ In different regions of Nigeria, Iyamí is also known as Iya Nla, who in turn is sometimes identified as the *orisha* Odú, while in other instances Iyamí is identified as Yemoja, the *orisha* of salt water and the mother of all the deities.⁷⁶ Cuban members of the Egbe Gèlèdè strive to be good mothers and wives, attend to the upbringing of their children and the family, and to study the lives of little-known or undiscovered women.⁷⁷ The Gèlèdè is one way in which women in Ocha-Ifá are attempting to halt and reverse the cultural destruction occasioned by the slave trade.⁷⁸ At a time in which the bodies of non-white women are exoticised in tourist brochures and billboards, making claims on motherhood demands an alternative view of women of African descent from Cubans and tourists complicit in the consumption and perpetuation of these stereotypes.

There is no indication that the masquerade currently takes place in Cuba, although certain societies and practices associated with it existed at the turn of the twentieth century or were introduced sometime in the middle of the century.⁷⁹ There is, however, a liturgical recognition of the Gèlèdè in Cuba in one of the 256 myths of Ifá. Osa Meji, one of the sixteen major *odús* of Ifá with which all practitioners are familiar, accounts for the Gèlèdè's existence and prescribes certain procedures to follow to avoid running afoul of the *ajés*. In this myth, the creator, Olodumaré, sent three *orishas* to earth:

Obarisa, Ogún and Iya Nla. Oludumaré gave Obarisa *aché* (spiritual power) and war to Ogún, but Iya Nla did not receive anything, so she complained to Olodúmare who responded by giving her the title 'Mother of All' and a calabash with a bird in it. When Olodúmare asked Iya Nla what she would do with her powers she told him that she would use them against her enemies but would give wealth and children to all who appealed her. Moreover, those who joined her could not be harmed.⁸⁰

Once again, the bird contained in a calabash appears as symbolic of the female *orisha's* power. Reproduction and the ability to bestow life are also central elements that serve to organise ritual structure and praxis. Iya Nla is therefore a significant deity for both men and women and as such is highly regarded and respected. Like all *orishas*, however, Iya Nla could be dangerous if underappreciated or challenged. To establish equilibrium between the human and spiritual worlds, Osa Meji also reveals how to appease Iya Nla.

The *orishas*, like human beings, are impulsive, curious and flawed. Out of curiosity, Orúnmila wanted to go to the land of the *ajés*, so he consulted the oracle to determine the best approach:

The Ifá oracle [Odú] advised Orúnmila to sacrifice a wooden image, a baby sash, and metal anklets before going to visit the 'haven of the-wielders-of-bird-power'. Orúnmila did this and returned safely singing: 'I have entered into a covenant with Death, and never will I die. Death, no more. I have entered into a covenant with Sickness, and never will I die. Death, no more'.⁸¹

In order to go to the land of the *ajé*, Orúnmila had to *be* one of them. He therefore disguised himself as a woman by wearing a mask and a baby sash (for carrying babies, worn only by women). The metal anklets kept him anchored in the material world. This appropriation of female cultural genitals enabled Orúnmila to 'know' the secret of the *ajé* and he used it to 'trick' them.⁸² Yet, in becoming an *ajé*, however transitorily, the *ajés* could not harm Orúnmila.

Perhaps more important than establishing the relationship between Odú and Orúnmila, however, these myths repeatedly insist that those who join Odú (Iya Nla, the *ajés*) would not be harmed. Odú would protect the appropriately initiated insiders to the Egbe Gèlèdè...and also Ifá.

'Women penetrate Ifá'

Protected from the wrath of Odú through prior initiation to the Egbe Gèlèdè, María Cuesta Conde and Nidia Águila de León were the first two Cuban women Victor Betancourt initiated to Ifá in March 2000.⁸³ Calling the female version of Ifá and the women initiated to it *Iyáonifá*, Betancourt insisted that he was 'restor[ing] women's legitimate right [to work in Ifá]...contribut[ing] to the development of moral ethics in the Ifá tradition [and] purif[ying] the cult through the new incorporation of the feminine gender'.⁸⁴ Betancourt merged the once diametrically opposed images of Africa, witchcraft and Ocha-Ifá with women, morality and purity to serve Cubans of African descent. Something had gone awry in Ifá during the twentieth century and, in Betancourt's analysis of the situation, women were the morally superior symbols of purity that would solve the problem.

In justifying and defending Iyáonifá, Victor Betancourt has repeatedly referenced the history of the religion in Cuba and a handful of female possession priestesses universally recognised as powerful and capable diviners of Ocha and as important ritual ancestors who practitioners continue to recognise in *moyubas* (songs) to honour the ancestors.⁸⁵ These women, however, were also known as astute, cunning and wily, hardly characteristics associated with morality and purity. Moreover, one of these women was responsible for some of the most significant innovations of the early twentieth century.

In addition to amalgamating the multiple *orisha* traditions into Ocha, Latuán also created the *obá oriaté* (master of ceremonies), a religious specialist who performed all initiation ceremonies and consecrated sacred objects in Ocha. Moreover, in a struggle for dominance of Ocha, Latuán used her position to sanction or condone particular practices.⁸⁶ She trained only one disciple, Lorenzo Samá, who in turn trained only two men to succeed him. By the time of Samá's death in 1944, the office of the *obá oriaté* had become an increasingly male domain and, in spite of the prominent role women had played in both the development of the specialty and the training of their successors, they quickly disappeared from the office.⁸⁷

The elimination of women from such a powerful ritual function suggests that creole adherents, unlike their African mentors, accepted and absorbed into their religious practice notions from the Cuban elite concerning the appropriate gender roles for men and women where respectability and status were tied to notions of honour controlled through marriage, to reinforce and regulate women's subjugation.⁸⁸ Although non-whites could never remove the stain of slavery, they employed a variety of techniques to distance themselves from it, including marrying white Cubans to lighten the skin of their offspring and conforming to elite behavioural expectations. Yielding a great deal of power and challenging the alleged natural authority of men was not consistent with the behaviour becoming for women in the twentieth century, especially among black Cubans who struggled to minimise differences between themselves and white Cubans, even as they continued to recognise their distinct heritage.⁸⁹

These gendered changes taking place in Ocha also impacted Ifá. While related, Ocha and Ifá had maintained a certain ritual distance in Cuba. Very few *babalawos* had arrived in Cuba as slaves and they in turn trained very few men in the tradition until the mid-twentieth century, a custom that partially explains the popularity of Ocha, and other African-derived religions, among both men and women. While practitioners of Ocha and Ifá participated in the same ceremonies, neither relied on the other to perform rites or initiate new members. *Babalawos* initiated *babalawos* to Ifá and the *obás oriatés* initiated adherents to Ocha.⁹⁰ Men consecrated to Ocha, however, could later enter Ifá and at some point during the mid-twentieth century it became common for

men to follow their Ocha initiation with initiation to Ifá.⁹¹ This staging of initiations enabled *babalawos* to both observe and participate in Ocha rituals from which they would have been excluded if initiated only to Ifá, thereby compelling closer religious ties between the two traditions. Critics of Ifá argue that the practice gave *babalawos* more control over Ocha while others suggest that the ritual links between the two traditions helped to provide practitioners with a united front when faced with state repression intent on eliminating the cultural expressions of a race it could not accept.⁹²

David H. Brown has also suggested that control over Ifá and its originally scarce ritual power began to weaken by mid-century, as the creole *babalawos* trained by Africans passed away. These first generation creole *babalawos* had hand-picked the men who they would eventually initiate into Ifá and forced them to undergo extensive training prior to initiation. Their successors attracted more disciples and relaxed the rules, leading to an overall expansion of Ifá. But one *babalawo* in particular was responsible for the majority of initiations that took place between the 1960s and 1980s. Taking advantage of this mid-century power vacuum, Miguel Febles Padrón began initiating men to Ifá based on their ability to pay for the initiation ceremony. This practice continued until his death in the mid-1980s, although by that time many other *babalawos* had also begun to initiate large numbers of men, mostly to be able to compete with Febles Padrón for spiritual capital.⁹³ It is no mere coincidence, therefore, that Victor Betancourt often refers to Febles Padrón in defence of his own innovations.

As a result of this expansion of Ifá, it had become the main objective for many men interested in joining a religion of African origin by the 1990s and they began skipping the initial step of joining an Ocha house. The overall impact of these aspirations to Ifá has, however, feminised Ocha.⁹⁴ Men who can, prefer to become *babalawos* and those who do not could be suspected of being homosexual. Spirit possession, for example, continues to be a central and desirable part of Ocha religious praxis and is understood as confirmation that initiation to a particular *orisha* was appropriate. Men, however, generally avoid being possessed by female *orishas* for fear of having their masculinity questioned.⁹⁵ Being spiritually passive in relation to a male *orisha*, paradoxically, does not imply such speculation. Public performance, rather than private acts, determines an individual's gender in Ocha-Ifá and compels men, much more than women, towards heterosexuality, indicating that adherents ultimately accepted twentieth-century Cuban assumptions of gender as flowing naturally from anatomical sex.

Betancourt unmistakably seeks to use *Iyáonifá* to restore some of the power women lost over the twentieth century as men usurped their specialties – he has openly stated this in interviews with journalists and scholars, as well as in articles he has written on the subject. What he does not state, yet is implicit in the logic used to justify the participation of women in Ifá, is an observance of

the compulsory heterosexuality that the majority of *babalawos* absorbed after decades of repression based on alleged sexual non-conformity, a revolutionary obsession with homosexuality and its association with counter-revolutionary activity. *Babalawos* confronted racist culture by denying male sexual transgression and embracing the longstanding ideal of masculinity that praised men for their virility and effective control of women.⁹⁶

Betancourt does not, however, identify sociopolitical processes, persistent racial stereotypes and what Alejandro de la Fuente calls the ‘traumatic process of dealing with racism and discrimination’ as the origin of the prohibition against homosexuality.⁹⁷ Rather, he appeals to what he calls the ‘natural complementarity’ between men and women:

we know that in order for a human being to be born, two must intervene, in the same way. And the ceremonies can be different, the woman on the bottom and the man on top or the man on the bottom and the woman on top, the man gives and the woman receives. Right here, in the sacred encounter, there are ceremonies and rituals that remind us of how a man and a woman can give birth.⁹⁸

Not only does Betancourt advocate a particular variety of heterosexuality, as Gayle Rubin might argue, he advocates sex for the purpose of procreation, at least metaphorically, in a ritual context.⁹⁹ A causal relationship between sex, gender and desire must exist to stabilise ritual practice.¹⁰⁰ This vision restricts entry to Ifá, albeit in a less limited sense than before, and maintains a gender hierarchy in which binary relationships privilege heterosexuality, reinforcing the authority of men in Ifá.¹⁰¹ In order to illustrate this point, it is useful to examine some of the criticism Betancourt has received from other *babalawos* in Cuba.

Condemnation of Betancourt and his initiation of women to Ifá follows one of two arguments. The first posits that because women cannot become *babalawos* and work with Odú, Betancourt and others like him are deceiving the women, exposing them to certain danger and retaliation from the *orisha* for disobeying her taboo. A number of *babalawos* argue that in Nigeria there exist three categories of women who can work with Ifá: the *apètèbí* (apeterbi), *iyánifá* and *iyálówò*. As in Cuba, the *apètèbí* fulfils the limited role of preparing the Ifá room or ritual space for the *babalawo*, but the *iyánifá* and *iyálówò* can care for the deity and divine with the divining chain once they reach menopause.¹⁰² Betancourt's error is in allowing pre-menopausal women to come into contact with Odú.

Yet, an examination of the initiation process for the *iyáonifás* in Cuba demonstrates that Betancourt does indeed observe these taboos. Both *babalawos* and *iyáonifás* receive the red parrot feather that is later placed in a calabash during the initiation ceremony.¹⁰³ *Babalawos*, however, eventually enter Odú's grove (a sacred exterior space inhabited by the *orisha*) to be

‘reborn’ through their contact with Odú. *Iyáonifás* must remain outside of Odú’s grove and forego the ‘rebirth’, although their heads are shaved to symbolise their new beginning in Ifá.¹⁰⁴ If entering Odú’s grove is as crucial to Ifá praxis as it appears, then women do not enjoy all the benefits of initiation and divination. The grove and contact with Odú serve to privilege men and place them at the top of the religious hierarchy. Women are viewed as potentially, if not actually, destabilising elements.

The second argument against the *iyáonifás* sustains that Cuban tradition simply does not permit the initiation of women to Ifá and that such initiations would never have occurred under the guidance of older *babalawos* because they followed Cuban traditions.¹⁰⁵ Significantly, these critics cite Cuba, not Africa as the source of gender discrimination in Ocha-Ifá and refer to the *odú* Eyila Shebora to justify their position. In this myth, Yemayá learned to divine by watching her husband Orúnmila. She then made a living through divination in her husband's absence. Upon discovery of Yemayá's betrayal, Orúnmila consulted Ifá and was told that he could give Yemayá advice or spiritual influence (*cofá*) but he could no longer live with her. As one particularly irate *babalawo* stated in response to Betancourt's initiation of women, ‘This is the birth of women not as *babalaos*, nor as priests, but as *apeterbi* of Orula [Orúnmila], slave of Ifá’.¹⁰⁶ This notion of women being unable to contain secrets or other ritual information is a particularly Cuban phenomenon, as is the masculine response to chastise women by reducing or eliminating their religious power.¹⁰⁷ Women are seen as interlopers who must be kept in their place.

More than a decade after the initiation of the first *iyáonifás*, it is clear that while they crossed a significant gendered barrier, women have yet to gain acceptance among the men in Ifá. Although they interpret Odú's message, the *iyáonifás* do not participate in the largest Ifá ceremony that augurs the events of the New Year and attracts thousands of *babalawos* from all over the world.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, those seeking the assistance of Ifá in solving their problems continue to prefer the *babalawo* to the *iyáonifá*, although a few individuals approach the *iyáonifás* out of curiosity. Nidia Águila de León, however, has confessed that she has yet to be taken seriously by those seeking advice.¹⁰⁹

Conclusions

In spite of the fact that initiates to Ocha-Ifá increasingly came from different class and racial backgrounds by the end of the twentieth century, it retained its African identity for both adherents and broader Cuban society. The initiation of *iyáonifás* was one among many gendered manoeuvres responding to state and societal pressures to discipline and control African cultural expressions and, by extension, Africans and their descendants who continued to

experience racial discrimination long after it had been 'officially' eliminated.¹¹⁰ Appropriation of taxonomies used to subordinate and control Cubans of African descent became the means through which one *babalawo* sought to expand the power of women in Ocha-Ifá and revise its history in Cuba. Witchcraft, once seen as the underworld domain of black men, became a feminine pursuit purged of its potentially destructive elements through a conscious recoding of sacred symbols. Bourgeois interpretations of spirit-possession as uncontrolled and unconventional sex were reformulated to represent stable, reproductive sex culminating in motherhood and the non-spirit possession, Ifá portion of the Yoruba religious complex. Witches would now occupy themselves with domesticity, caring for their families just as early twentieth century intellectuals had expected African women to do.

Yet, the myths Victor Betancourt reinterpreted to destabilise the gendered hierarchy of Ifá and accommodate women, served to prohibit the initiation of anyone but heterosexual men and women to the priesthood. This was clearly a deliberate manoeuvre as analyses of nineteenth-century Yoruba practices and early twentieth-century Cuban customs suggest that adherence to binaries was not a necessary or salient feature of *orisha* worship. In fact, the opposite was true. Rather than surmising that late twentieth-century devotees like Betancourt had lost the possibility of recognising the malleability of gender, I suggest that it was consciously ignored and publicly recognised as ritual knowledge lost in translation when practice became more Cuban. In doing so, rather than destabilising gender and sexuality, initiating women to Ifá was a way to stabilise these as coherent identities flowing naturally from anatomy in order to maintain the precarious position of Ifá atop the hierarchy of religions of African origin in Cuba.

Notes

I would like to thank the Graduate and Professional Students' Association, the Office of Graduate Studies and the Tinker Foundation, as well as the Latin American and Iberian Institute's Doctoral Fellowship, all at the University of New Mexico, for funding the research for this chapter.

- ¹ On racial democracy, see Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
- ² Fernando Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujos (Apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal)* (Madrid: Editorial América, 1917), p. 19. Ortiz's criminological study of these religions formed the basis for both regional and national legislation aimed at eliminating all religions of African origin.
- ³ In this effort, I accept Pete Sigal's challenge to historians to employ queer

- analysis in examining gender and/or sexuality in order to understand the way in which notions ‘that approximate sexuality destabilize the very category of the sexual’ in non-western and/or colonised cultures. Pete Sigal, ‘Latin America and the Challenge of Globalizing the History of Sexuality’, *American Historical Review* 114 (2009), pp. 1340–53. On destabilising gender, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ‘A epistemologia do amário’, *cadernos pagú* 28 (January–June, 2007), pp. 19–54; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990; New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 4 Some researchers refer to this religious complex as Santería, while others identify all religions of African origin collectively as Santería. I use Ocha-Ifá, as they are the terms many practitioners prefer and they clearly indicate reference to the Yoruba religious traditions.
 - 5 The metaphor of horse and rider may indicate a dominance of Òyó Yoruba traditions in Cuba. The Òyó Empire used horses to conquer and subjugate new peoples and regions and female possession priests prepared male combatants for battle. See J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire that is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyó Yoruba Religion* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005).
 - 6 Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Parvasini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), p. 33.
 - 7 See e.g., Randy P. Connor and David Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Participation in African Inspired Traditions in the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Mary Ann Clark, *Where Men are Wives and Mothers Rule* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Tabaré Guerere, *Las diosas negras, la santería en femenino* (Caracas: Alfadil Ediciones, 1995).
 - 8 Matory, *Sex and the Empire*.
 - 9 Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
 - 10 Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, pp. 7–8; Oyèwùmí, *Invention of Women*, p. 69.
 - 11 Mary Ann Clark discusses the concept and role of cultural genitals in *Where Men Are Wives*.
 - 12 The nineteenth-century trial of Enriqueta Fabez, a woman who disguised herself as a man, practised medicine and married a woman, is illustrative of this point. Julio González Pagés, ‘Género y masculinidad en Cuba: ¿El otro lado de una historia?’, *Nueva antropología* 61 (2002), pp. 117–26,

here p. 121.

- 13 See Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, p. 7.
- 14 I disagree with Oyèwùmí's argument that Yoruba society was not gendered, as she herself demonstrates in many ways that it was, but rather suggest that it was not gendered in the way that western cultures conceptualise gender. Her emphasis on kinship, age and insider-outsider status explains how individuals could have multiple, malleable social identities at one time, simply depending on the context in which they found themselves in a given moment. Oyèwùmí, *Invention of Women*.
- 15 Andrew Apter, 'The Embodiment of Paradox: Yoruba Kingship and Female Power', *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (1991), pp. 212–29.
- 16 Oyèwùmí, *Invention of Women*, p. 52.
- 17 Verena Martínez Alier, *Marriage, Class and Color in Nineteenth Century Colonial Cuba* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), p. 2.
- 18 Aline Helg, 'Black Men, Racial Stereotyping, and Violence in the US South and Cuba at the Turn of the Century', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (2000), pp. 576–604, here p. 577.
- 19 On the *cabildos de nación*, see Phillip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998). On their role in preserving Yoruba ethnic identity through religion, see David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- 20 There were a number of revolts in which slaves used their religious festivities as the means to both organise and communicate instructions between plantations. The most well-known are the Aponte rebellion of 1812 in Havana (Aponte himself was free, but used the Yoruba religion to organise slaves on plantations) and the Escalera Conspiracy of 1844 in Matanzas, led by a Yoruba woman. Plantation owners generally permitted music and dancing among their slaves to reduce the likelihood of revolt, especially after 1844. See José Luciano Franco, *La conspiración de Aponte* (Havana: Consejo Nacional de Cultura, 1963); Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1990).
- 21 Rebecca J. Scott was the first to identify this phenomenon in *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

- 22 Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana, Registro de Asociaciones; Archivo Provincial de Matanzas, Religiones Africanas.
- 23 On the murder of the 'niña Zoila', as she was known, see Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship and Race in Cuba, 1902–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
- 24 *Diario de la Marina* offers some fine examples of clients charging witches and warlocks with fraud for failing to resolve personal issues such as love, finances and health. Plaintiffs of all races reported defendants of all races to the police and brought their cases before judges. Most cases revolved around the efficacy of the practice and whether or not the witch had complied with her client's request or not. The exchange of money was common in these relationships, therefore, many denunciations sought to recuperate that spent on fraudulent spells or talismans. Publicly shaming the witch through the accusation and trial also served to reduce her prestige and guarantee a loss of clients, eventually putting the witch out of business. See for example: 'Brujería', Crónica de Policía, *Diario de la Marina*, 7 January 1902, edición de la tarde, p. 4; 'Brujería', Crónica de Policía, *Diario de la Marina*, 26 August 1902, edición de la tarde, p. 4; 'Brujería', Crónica de Policía, *Diario de la Marina*, 21 August 1902, edición de la tarde, p. 4; 'La brujería en Matanzas – En Bellamar el pueblo indignado trató de linchar a un brujo. Trataba de robar un niño', *Diario de la Marina*, edición de la mañana, 25 June 1919, p. 1
- 25 Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*, p. 44.
- 26 Helg, 'Black Men, Racial Stereotyping', p. 583.
- 27 Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana*, pp. 365, 388.
- 28 Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, p. 217.
- 29 Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana*, p. 194.
- 30 Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana*, pp. 38, 365, 214. Researchers have long suspected that female slaves practised abortion, either to limit the number of children they had or to avoid bearing offspring condemned to a life of slavery. This phenomenon remains difficult to prove as it does not appear in historical records, although infanticide certainly does. What has been clear for some time, however, is that slave women had considerably fewer offspring than free black women. María del Carmen Barcia Zequeira, *La otra familia: Parientes, redes y descendencia de los esclavos en Cuba* (Havana: Casa de las Americas, 2003), p. 66.
- 31 Clark, *Where Men Are Wives*, p. 121.

- 32 Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana*, p. 136.
- 33 Helg, 'Black Men, Racial Stereotyping', pp. 589–90.
- 34 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 34.
- 35 'ejecutan contorciones con sus cuerpos que ofendan a la moral', Gerardo Machado, Presidente de Cuba, Decreto no. 2156, Gaceta Oficial de la Republica de Cuba 23 no.96, tomo 4 (25 October 1925), p. 10034, cited in Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1902–1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), pp. 231–2.
- 36 The Tribunal de Urgencias established in each province for urgent judicial matters contains documentation concerning the activities of the police and the interest the state took in plotting the social networks of accused witches and warlocks. See for example, Archivo Provincial de Matanzas, Fondo Audiencia (Asuntos Generales), 'Expediente relativo a causa seguida contra Federico González Castillo por un delito relacionado con brujería 30 April – 18 July 1906', leg. 19, no. 359; Fondo Audiencia (Asuntos Generales), 'Expediente relativo a causa seguida contra Dolores Fiallo Pérez por práctica de brujería, 7–19 January 1946', leg. 35, no. 565.
- 37 Natalia Bolivar Aróstegui, *Los orishas en Cuba* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 1990), p. 13.
- 38 Miguel Ramos, 'La división de la Habana: Territorial Conflict and Cultural Hegemony in the Followers of Oyo Lukumí Religion, 1850s–1920s', *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003), pp. 38–70, esp. pp. 48, 53; Clark, *Where Men Are Wives*, p. 113.
- 39 On Ogún and gender, see Matory, *Sex and the Empire*.
- 40 Clark, *Where Men are Wives*, p. 67.
- 41 Several researchers have noted the long-standing hostility in Matanzas to Ifá and the babalawo, possibly because of the prominent role women had in Ocha throughout the twentieth century. See Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, p. 20. Several people I interviewed in Matanzas between 2005 and 2007 cited the scarcity of babalawos as the reason women were able to enjoy such prestige in the region. Raúl 'Kimbo' Domínguez Valdez, Regla Mesa Milanés, Juan García, Dolores Pereira, interviewed by the author, Matanzas, December 2007.
- 42 Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, pp. 91–2.

- 43 Clark, *Where Men are Wives*, p. 65.
- 44 Clark, *Where Men are Wives*, p. 65.
- 45 Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 290.
- 46 Ocha-Ifá and the Abakuá (Calabar) were the most oft-performed religions of African origin.
- 47 Juan García, a practitioner of Ocha, performer and eventual director of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (CFN), saw two very different processes occurring simultaneously. First, the *orishas* and drums that had previously been confined to ‘sacred sites’ in houses were taken to the stage. Second, the people who went to see the performances did not see the *orishas*, they saw the men and women dancing based on the ‘displacement’ that the choreographers had designed. Spectators essentially saw what they wanted to see. Interviewed by the author, Matanzas, December 2007. On the value of folklore, see Christine Ayorinde, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution and National Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), p. 108.
- 48 Several non-white practitioners I interviewed expressed this concern, but also continued to initiate whites, partly because Ocha-Ifá ‘does not discriminate’ and partly because it is economically beneficial to do so as white Cubans tend to have greater access to the foreign currency necessary for purchasing scarce items. ‘Kimbo’, interview with the author, Matanzas, December 2007; Victor Betancourt, interview with the author, Havana, November 2007.
- 49 ‘*su religión para satisfacer sus apetitos y aberraciones sexuales*’. Quoted in Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui and Román Orozco, *Cuba Santa: Comunistas, santeros y cristianos en la isla de Fidel Castro* (Madrid: El País Aguilar, 1998), p. 370.
- 50 Bolívar Aróstegui and Orozco, *Cuba Santa*, p. 370.
- 51 Abel Sierra Madero argues that ‘many men have become homosexuals because the social environment has inferred it upon them’ [muchos hombres han devenido homosexuales porque el medio social los ha inducido a ello] (author’s translation). Abel Sierra Madero, *La nación sexuada: Relaciones de género y sexo en Cuba (1830–1855)* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2002), p. 66. On homosexuality and the revolution, see José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 124–44.
- 52 Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 57.

- 53 Lourdes Argüelles and B. Ruby Rich, 'Homosexuality, Homophobia and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience, Part I,' *Signs* 9 (1984), pp. 683–99, esp. pp. 687, 692.
- 54 Alejandro de la Fuente, 'The New Afro-Cuban Cultural Movement and the Debate on Race in Contemporary Cuba', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40 (2008), pp. 697–720, here p. 713.
- 55 Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte* (1954; Havana: Editorial SI-MAR, 1996), p. 52.
- 56 Cabrera, *El Monte*, pp. 50, 52–3.
- 57 This phenomenon is more regional and characteristic of Havana rather than Matanzas, the other centre of Ocha-Ifá. One of my Matanzas informants suggested that the dominance of the *babalawos* in Havana can account for the propagation of this theory, while their minimal presence in Matanzas explains the receptivity to spirit possession in that region. Domínguez, interview with the author, 2007.
- 58 Most Cubans participated in this programme through military support for African wars of national independence as soldiers, technicians and teachers. Some participated in more culturally oriented programmes such as music. The programme also enabled Africans to study and participate in cultural exchanges in Cuba and the main proponent of initiating women to Ifá has strong connections to Nigerian practitioners of the Yoruba religious complex. On internationalism, see Susan Eckstein, 'Cuban Internationalism', in Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk (eds), *Cuba: Twenty-five Years of Revolution, 1959–1984* (New York, Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1985), pp. 372–90.
- 59 The practice originated in the USA in 1985 when a Nigerian *babalawo* initiated Daifá to the priesthood, making her the first female Ifá diviner in the Americas.
- 60 Betancourt, interview with the author, November 2007.
- 61 Victor Betancourt Estrada in Rogelio Fabio Hurtado, 'El poder de Olokún', *Consenso* 5 (2006), available at <http://www.desdecuba.com/10/articulos/1_01.shtml>, consulted 15 March 2008.
- 62 Victor Betancourt Estrada, 'El fenómeno Iyónifá en Cuba', *Consenso* 2/1 (2005), <http://www.desdecuba.com/01/articulos/1_01.shtml> (accessed 6 August, 2013), p. 1.
- 63 Betancourt Estrada, 'El fenómeno Iyónifá en Cuba', p. 2.
- 64 Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Oxford, Maldon:

- 65 On the gains women made 1959–89, see Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- 66 While most researchers recognise the policies designed to incorporate women into the workforce, higher education and non-tradition jobs, some suggest that women were manipulated because these policies have been strategic, designed to fill labour shortages and achieve production goals. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, pp. 139–40.
- 67 Betancourt Estrada, ‘El fenómeno Iyáonifá’, p. 1.
- 68 Afolabi A. Epega and Philip John Neimark, *The Sacred Ifá Oracle* (New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, 1995); Maybell Padilla Pérez also noted that Ifá does not take life from those consecrated to it. Maybell Padilla Pérez, ‘Sacerdotisa y brujas’, *Consenso* 6 (2006), available at, <http://www.desdecuba.com/11/articulos/9_01.shtml> (accessed 12 May 2012).
- 69 In Nigeria, it would be a calabash. In Cuban practice, soup tureens, clay pots and other common receptacles with lids serve as the calabash.
- 70 Clark argues that Cuban practitioners tend to view women as polluting due to menstruation, while the same process in Nigeria is seen as so powerful it can destabilise the *orishas*. Clark, *Where Men Are Wives*, p. 117.
- 71 Betancourt Estrada, ‘El fenómeno Iyáonifá’, p. 1; interview with the author, 2007.
- 72 On the Gèlèdè and the *ajé*, see Babatunde Lawal, *The Gèlèdè Spectacle: Art, Gender and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996); Henry Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gèlèdè: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba* (1983; Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990).
- 73 See e.g., Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Henry John Drewal, ‘Gèlèdè Masquerade: Imagery and Motif’, *African Arts* 7 (1974), pp. 8–19; Drewal and Drewal, *Gèlèdè*; Lawal, *Gèlèdè Spectacle*.
- 74 Both the *ajés* and the need to appease them became much more closely connected to the destructive power of witches under British colonisation of Nigeria. See Drewal and Drewal, *Gèlèdè*.
- 75 Padilla Pérez, ‘Sacerdotisas y brujas’; Drewal and Drewal, *Gèlèdè*.
- 76 In Cuba, different names for the same orisha are explained as different avatars or paths (*caminos*) of the deity.

- 77 Maybell Padilla Pérez belongs to Victor Betancourt's Ifá Iranlowo. Padilla Pérez, 'Sacerdotisas y brujas', p. 2.
- 78 Fuente, 'New Afro-Cuban Cultural Movement', p. 700.
- 79 Organisations or celebrations associated with Gèlèdè are the Egungun (related to the ancestors) and the Oro (related to death), both of which were brought to Cuba from West Africa, the first with the slave trade and the second through twentieth century 'returns' to Africa. On the Egungun, see Fernando Ortiz, *Los cabildos y las fiestas afrocubanas del Día de Reyes* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992). On the Oro, see Victor Betancourt Estrada, 'Respuestas a Felipe Ifaláde', *Consenso* 2 (2005), available at, <http://www.desdecuba.com/02/articulos/13_01.shtml> (accessed 15 August 2013). Both societies are the domain of men.
- 80 Babatunde Lawal, taken from Pierre Verger, in Babatunde Lawal, 'New Light on Gèlèdè', *African Arts* 11 (1978), pp. 65–70, here p. 66.
- 81 Lawal, *Gèlèdè Spectacle*, pp. 40–41.
- 82 Lawal, *Gèlèdè Spectacle*, pp. 40–41.
- 83 'Las mujeres penetran en Ifá' was the facetious title given to an article concerning the initiation of women to Ifá in *El Caiman Barbudo*, a cultural review published by Cuban youth. Mirta Fernández, 'Las mujeres penetran en Ifá', *El Caiman Barbudo* 9 (14 March 2009), accessed 10 July 2009 at, http://www.caimanbarbudo.cu/html_total/simpresas/articulos/345/index_articulo_09.htm. Url no longer available, but see *El Caimán Barbudo*, no. 345, marzo-abril 2008. Initiation was conducted through the Itèfá ceremony used in Cuba and West Africa to initiate boys and men to Ifá. Betancourt Estrada, 'El fenomeno Iyáonifá en Cuba', p. 2.
- 84 Betancourt Estrada, 'El fenomeno Iyáonifá en Cuba', p. 2; Betancourt, interviewed by the author, 2007.
- 85 Betancourt Estrada, 'El fenomeno Iyaonifa en Cuba', p. 1; interview with the author, 2007.
- 86 Ramos, 'La división de la Habana', p. 53.
- 87 Ramos, 'La división de la Habana', pp. 52–3.
- 88 Alyssa García, 'Continuous Moral Economies: The State Regulation of Bodies and Sex Work in Cuba', *Sexualities* 13 (2010), pp. 171–96, here p. 174.
- 89 Practitioners of religions of African origin consistently identified themselves as Africans or their descendents in the documents outlining the founding of their organisations until the 1959 revolution, even as they

emphasised the similarities between their beliefs and Christianity. Archivo Nacional de Cuba, *Registro de Asociaciones*.

- 90 Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, p. 151.
- 91 It is difficult to pinpoint this date, and it varies from family to family, although based on interviews with practitioners I have found that the practice was certainly common by the 1950s and appears to have endured until the mid- to late 1980s.
- 92 Concerning the details of this historic debate, see Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, pp. 151–5.
- 93 Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, pp. 89–90.
- 94 Tomás Fernández Robaina, interview with the author, Havana, June 2006.
- 95 Tomás Fernández Robaina, ‘Cuban Sexual Values and African Religious Beliefs’, in Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones and Gays*, p. 207. My informant in Matanzas, ‘Kimbo’, dismissed this attitude as a Havana-based practice that emerged as a result of the dominance of the *babalawo*. Interview with the author, 2007.
- 96 Garcia, ‘Continuous Moral Economies’, p. 175.
- 97 Fuente, ‘New Afro-Cuban Cultural Movement’, p. 702.
- 98 ‘sabemos que para que nazca un ser humano, tienen que intervenir dos, de la misma forma, y los ceremoniales pueden ser diferentes, la mujer abajo o el hombre arriba, o el hombre abajo y la mujer arriba, el hombre introduce y la mujer recibe. Aquí mismo, dentro del encuentro sagrado, hay ceremonias y rituales que nos recuerdan como un hombre y una mujer pueden dar a luz’. Betancourt, interviewed by the author, Havana, November 2007.
- 99 Gayle Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex’, in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 143–78, here p. 181.
- 100 On sex/gender/desire, see Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 31.
- 101 On compulsory heterosexuality, see Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 31.
- 102 Consejo de Sacerdotes Mayores de Ifá de la República de Cuba, ‘Nota aclaratoria al artículo publicado en el Caiman Barbudo sobre las IyanIfás’, 30 May 2008, <<http://www.cubayoruba.cult.cu/editorial/Nota%20Aclaratoria%20sobre%20las%20Iyanifa.htm>> (accessed 3 March 2009).

- 103 According to a *babalawo* in Matanzas with whom I spoke regarding the ceremony I had witnessed, the red parrot feather represents the power of the *babalawo* and forms part of the sacred items a *babalawo* receives upon initiation. Yurien Martínez Milián, conversation, Matanzas, December 2007.
- 104 Odú's grove is a symbolic space and in Betancourt's organisation is a wood frame structure surrounded by fabric, located at the far end of the yard. I was able to witness the last part of this initiation ceremony of children to Ifá in 2007 and Victor Betancourt later discussed the initiation of women with me. In response to my questions, Betancourt explained that the ceremony was *almost* identical for the boys and the girls, the only difference was in the prohibition against women entering Odú's grove. Interview with the author, 2007.
- 105 Jorge Felipe Marín, 'Réplica a "El fenómeno Iyáonifá"', *Consenso* 2/2 (2005), available at <http://www.desdecuba.com/01/articulos/2_01.shtml> (accessed 6 August 2006).
- 106 Marín, 'Réplica a "El fenómeno Iyáonifá"'.
- 107 Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, p. 154.
- 108 Lázaro Cuesta Valdés, 'Un mensaje necesario: La historia y significado de la Letra del Año', Comisión Organizadora de la Letra del Año Miguel Febles Padrón, 20 January 2005, available at, <www.folkcuba.com/aa_history_la_letra_do05.asp> (accessed 5 January 2006).
- 109 Most of the interest shown by practitioners is initially curiosity, not respect, although Águila de León insists that after consulting her they leave satisfied with her work. In Elsie Carbó, '¿Mujeres babalawos?', 15 March 2005, <<http://elsiecarbo.blogspot.com/2005/03/mujeres-babalawos.html>>.
- 110 Fidel Castro declared the elimination of racial discrimination in 1963 and all discussions of race were silenced thereafter. Race has re-emerged as a sensitive topic of discussion in Cuba only in the last decade.

Liberal Religion and the ‘Woman Question’ between East and West: Perspectives from a Nineteenth-Century Bengali Women's Journal

Clare Midgley

British and American Unitarians and members of the Brahmo Samaj of India belonged to liberal religious groups that played leading roles in movements to improve women's education and social position in Britain, the United States and colonial India.¹ Their engagements with the ‘woman question’ were informed by a shared conviction that human progress could be achieved through combining a rational or intuitive, rather than an authoritarian or dogmatic, approach to faith with a radical agenda of social reform. Unitarianism and Brahmoism did not develop in isolation from each other, but rather in the context of a long history of cross-cultural interchange and co-operation. This study, focused on analysis of articles published in the first Bengali women's journal, *Bamabodhini Patrika*, presents new evidence about the nature of the inter-cultural liberal religious milieu within which debates on the ‘woman question’ were shaped in the nineteenth-century world. In the process, it offers a fresh perspective on the role of religious movements in the global development of modern feminism.

From their consolidation in the 1820s as distinctive liberal religious groupings, Unitarians and Brahmos identified each other as kindred spirits. Unitarians in Britain and America formed national organisations in 1825, which brought together heterodox Protestant congregations who questioned the Trinitarian belief in Christ's divinity and rejected the Calvinist doctrine of original sin. United by a belief that ‘true religion’ was marked by good deeds rather than adherence to orthodox Christian dogma, they formed close-knit transatlantic networks promoting the abolition of slavery, social reform and women's rights.² These Unitarian networks inter-meshed with transoceanic webs of connection with the Brahmo Samaj (Society of Worshipers of the Supreme Being), founded in Calcutta in 1828 by Rammohun Roy to promote monotheistic religion and social reform among Hindus.³ Rammohun Roy engaged in extensive correspondence and exchange of tracts on religion and social reform with leading British and American Unitarians, and he cemented and extended these personal connections during an extended visit to Britain prior to his death in Bristol in 1833.⁴ He impressed Unitarians as a religious

thinker whose controversial pamphlet *Precepts of Jesus* provided external validation of their rejection of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and whose Hindu monotheism might prove a stepping-stone to Unitarian Christianity. Unitarians were also keen to engage with Roy as a social reformer whose opposition to *sati* (widow-burning) and promotion of female education chimed with their own desire to improve the position of women. Indeed, Lyn Zastoupil has recently highlighted Roy's impact on the development of British feminism.⁵

The cross-cultural 'imagined community' that developed between Brahmos and Unitarians was sustained after Roy's death in Bristol in 1833 through transoceanic processes of commemoration, as I have explored in an earlier article.⁶ These laid the ground for renewed connections in the 1860s and 1870s, centred on English Unitarian social reformer Mary Carpenter's co-operation with the male leadership of the Brahmo Samaj in an ambitious project of transnational social reform aimed at improving Indian women's education.⁷ This article seeks to broaden our understanding of Brahmo-Unitarian interchange on the 'woman question' at this period beyond the existing scholarly focus on the figure of Mary Carpenter. In so doing, it offers a different perspective on the relationship between religion and the 'woman question' in the age of empire than that dominant in earlier postcolonial feminist scholarship on colonial India. This scholarship convincingly highlighted the way the figure of the Hindu woman became the ground for the struggle over authority between imperial and indigenous elites, evangelical Christian missionaries and orthodox Brahmin priests. However, in so doing, it placed an overriding emphasis on religious polarisation, coloniser-colonised conflict and the erasure of Indian women's own voices.⁸ The focus here is instead on exploring what I consider to be the equally significant history of cross-cultural inter-exchange among religious groups, co-operation between 'western' and 'eastern' activists and the resultant openings for Indian women's agency which resulted from Brahmos' creative, critical and constructive engagement with western debates on the 'woman question'.⁹

The Bengali-language journal, *Bamabodhini Patrika* (Journal for the Enlightenment of Women), on which this discussion focuses, was a monthly journal for women that became the leading forum for debate on the 'woman question' in colonial India. The periodical was launched in 1863 by the Bamabodhini Sabha (Committee for the Enlightenment of Women), as part of a series of initiatives through which a dynamic new leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshub Chunder Sen, sought to reinvigorate the religious organisation. This revival was associated with a renewal of links with Unitarians, from whom the group had distanced itself in the 1840s and 1850s as it fought concerted attempts by Christian missionaries to gain converts among educated Bengali elites.¹⁰ Among Sen's key sources of inspiration were the writings of Theodore Parker, a leading American advocate of Transcendentalism. This

intellectual and spiritual movement moved beyond mainstream Unitarian Christianity in advocating a universal religion rooted in personal intuition, while reinforcing the established Unitarian emphasis on the importance of social action over adherence to a specific creed.¹¹ Transcendentalism, itself drawing inspiration from 'eastern' spiritualities, influenced Sen in the development of a new universalist theism which moved beyond Hindu reformism.¹² Sen and his young followers split in 1866 with the Adi (original) Brahmo Samaj to form the Brahmo Samaj of India, and pursued an ambitious plan to regenerate the nation as a whole through missionary activity throughout India. The group linked the promotion of theism with campaigns to abolish caste distinctions, to spread education to the masses and to improve the position of women through developing female education, attacking the custom of child marriage and encouraging widow remarriage. It was to help forward this agenda that Sen's followers persuaded Mary Carpenter to come to India to promote schools for girls independently of the Christian missionary societies who had led recent initiatives in female education. Sen extended his mission to Britain in 1870, seeking both to influence Unitarians to convert from Christianity to his brand of theism and to gain their support for his plans to improve female education in India. Unitarians themselves saw in Sen a worthy successor to Rammohun Roy: an inspiring religious leader who might fulfil their hopes that Indian religion and society could be reformed from within.¹³

Bamabodhini was founded only five years after the violent suppression of the Indian Rebellion and the establishment of Crown Rule, and Calcutta, the home of the journal, was the capital of Britain's Indian Empire. Brahmo men were part of a wider group of western-educated Indians who, under the racist structures of colonialism, lacked the access to the economic and political power exercised by their middle-class Unitarian counterparts in Britain and America.¹⁴ This sense of powerlessness fuelled the rise of cultural nationalism, and among some Indians this took the form of preserving 'tradition', manifested as hostility to attempts by the colonial government and Christian missionaries to interfere in the domain of family life and gender relations. Others, however, notably Sen and his followers, responded to the challenges of colonialism by formulating ambitious plans to regenerate the Indian nation from *within* through pursuing their own agendas of religious and social reform, with a focus on female education as a key to wider social improvement.¹⁵

Bamabodhini, though it initially had a tiny print run of 100, increasing to some 450 in 1873, reached subscribers from influential Brahmo families throughout Bengal and beyond, and was published continuously between 1863 and 1922. Rather than being a narrow sectarian publication, it was in the vanguard of debates on the 'woman question' in India, providing both men and women with 'a platform to think through the beliefs of an existing culture

in the hopes of glimpsing a new horizon'.¹⁶ Brahmo men sought to use the journal to engage Brahmo women in their interlinked agenda of social and religious reform and, in order to achieve this, they opened up the first public forum for Bengali women themselves to contribute to literate culture.¹⁷ *Bamabodhini* has, not surprisingly, been used extensively as a source by researchers in Bengali women's history, and it is not my intention to reiterate the many insights into female agency that analysis of the separate sections devoted to women's own writings in *Bamabodhini* has already afforded.¹⁸ What has not yet been explored, and forms the focus of this article, is the journal's value as a source for illuminating the cross-cultural liberal religious milieu of reform within which debates on the 'woman question' took place at this period. Drawing on a set of new translations of articles published during the first decade of the journal's publication between 1863 and 1874, my aim here is to throw fresh light on this pivotal period in the development of debates on the 'woman question' in Britain, America and Bengal. It was a decade which not only saw the consolidation of organised movements for women's rights in Britain and America but also, in Bengal, strides forward in women's education and female participation in literate culture, the initiation of campaigns against child marriage and the creation of the first women's organisation.

Unitarian women activists as exemplars for Brahmo women

Bamabodhini published articles articulating a range of approaches to the 'woman question' among Brahmo supporters of Keshub Sen, ranging from the paternalist approach of Sen himself to the more emancipationist stance of the journal's editor, Umesh Chandra Dutta. This diversity is evident in the first two articles that the journal published, and illustrates the limitations of earlier interpretations of social reform in colonial India as the 'recasting' of patriarchy along western lines.¹⁹ Its 'Introduction' stressed the 'utmost importance' of extending the 'rays of education' into the *antahpur* (the inner quarters of the joint family home where respectable Bengali women lived in seclusion) so that women could replace their 'delusions and superstitions' with 'true knowledge', and stop acting as an obstacle to 'the country's betterment and development'.²⁰ Here the main concern seems less about benefiting women themselves than about stopping them being blocks to national progress through encouraging them to adopt the enlightened Brahmo approach to religion rather than continuing to adhere to traditional Hindu socio-cultural practices. However, the following article was much more woman-centred. It took the form of an imagined dialogue in which one Bengali woman seeks to persuade another of the benefits of female education. Education, she argues, would not only improve women's relationships with their husbands, but also help them fulfil their own potential, and perhaps even

lead them into wider social roles, including earning money by writing books and holding women's meetings to develop their own ideas 'for the betterment of the country'.²¹ The inclusion of a section of women's writings in each issue of the journal encouraged this wider outlook, enabling women to begin to publish their own writings, including both poems and essays on women's roles and education.

From the beginning, a decision was made by the editor to publish articles that encouraged Bengali women to widen their horizons through presenting as exemplary role models women from western liberal religious backgrounds in the vanguard of women's entry into the public sphere. This decision was motivated in part by a belief that women lacked indigenous Indian female role models with whom they could identify. Trying to encourage Indian women to gain an education by pointing to the 'many examples of educated women from our ancient times', the author argued, would not be effective because these women 'are taken as deities by popular belief' rather than seen as role models by ordinary women. Instead, Harriet Martineau, 'a very well known figure in the field of Sociology' was presented as an ideal role model: a woman who, through her courage and persistence, had successfully overcome severe obstacles to her education and self-development caused by her frail health, deafness and family difficulties, and had gone on to write numerous learned books.²²

Underlying the choice of Martineau as exemplar was her Unitarian background, her history of personal links with the Brahmo Samaj and her admiration for Rammohun Roy, whom she had met during his stay in England.²³ Brahmos' sense of religious affinity with Unitarians also meant Martineau could be presented as an appropriate role model encouraging Brahmo women to become writers on religion. Conveniently ignoring the fact that she had abandoned Unitarianism for free-thought by the early 1840s – she was described in *Bamabodhini* as a 'monotheist' who 'belonged to a Christian sect' – the biography began by praising her early religious writings and attributed her rise to fame after 1830 to her ability to write about religion with exceptional learning. Her writings on religion are the starting point of her successful career as a leading sociologist, historian and novelist whose writings revolved around 'powerful subjects' including 'the betterment of women'. Asking rhetorically 'Do we see such brave women in our society?', the article went on to draw out 'important lessons' that could be learned by Bengali women from her life history: women could overcome obstacles to achieve education and self-development; they could become erudite and famous; education would enable women to become effective in both the domestic sphere and wider society; and a woman's adherence to principle was the mark of a 'great soul'.²⁴

Martineau's single status was perhaps the hardest thing to explain to Bengali women living in a society where custom dictated that all girls should marry by

the age of puberty. The article, however, took care to explain Martineau's singleness in a positive way: 'Miss', it noted, was 'a title given to English women who dedicate their lives for the betterment of their country'. A few years later, reporting on Unitarian social reformer Mary Carpenter's visit to Calcutta to promote Indian women's education, the journal went further in presenting singleness as a positive choice for women keen to improve other women's lives, as the lack of a husband gave women freedom of movement and action. It described Carpenter as 'a woman of great deeds' who 'did not get married because that would have enchained her to a particular place and she would not have been able to pursue her dreams'.²⁵

Another exemplary single western woman featured in the same article in *Bamabodhini* was Frances Power Cobbe who, like Martineau, was praised for her religious writings: her work on religion and morality was described as 'so powerful that it would transform even the worst of the sinners'.²⁶ Like Keshub Sen, Cobbe had found religious inspiration in the writings of the American Unitarian Transcendentalist Theodore Parker, whose works she published as an edited collection in 1863.²⁷ Cobbe had become acquainted with the Brahmo Samaj through her friendship with Mary Carpenter and participation in London Unitarian circles. In August 1866, she published in *Fraser's Magazine* an essay providing the first history of the Brahmo Samaj for an English readership, which presented a highly positive picture of its leadership in social and religious reform in India.²⁸ In 1869, *Bamabodhini* was 'immensely happy' to retail the news that the Secretary of the Brahmo Samaj had received a letter from 'a very learned English lady' – who can confidently be identified as Cobbe – asserting her sense of religious affinity to Brahmos. She explained that a Brahmo is similar to what English people call a 'theist', and claimed to be a Brahmi herself 'since her religious sensibilities are similar to Brahmoism'.²⁹ Cobbe's religious affinities with Sen clearly made her an ideal western woman to present as a role model of the educated woman making a valuable contribution to the moral development of society, especially as she articulated an intercultural female religious identity through identifying herself as a Brahmi.

Bamabodhini also presented western Unitarian women's independent travel and public speaking by women in a positive way to its middle-class female readership. It praised Mary Carpenter for 'crossing the treacherous sea alone' in order to 'do some good for our women' and reported that she had attended several meetings organised by men at which she had 'delivered inspiring public speeches towards the progress of Indian women'.³⁰ Another news item reported on 'numerous women preachers in England who propagate religion through their speeches' and informed readers that Julia Ward Howe had recently delivered a 'brilliant speech' entitled 'Let there be peace and friendship in the world', while Mary A. Livermore had delivered 'another inspiring speech'.³¹ Howe, an American Unitarian Transcendentalist, and her

friend Mary A. Livermore, a Universalist (a member of an American religious group who, like Unitarians, believed in universal salvation and rejected the doctrine of original sin), were becoming renowned in the world of transatlantic reform as public lecturers.³² Such articles gave Bengali women information about a wider world in which some women played leading roles in the public sphere.

This sense of liberal religion as providing an avenue to wider roles for women was reinforced in other articles praising western women's international travel and active participation in organisations and debates. American and European women's intercontinental travel, 'especially for missionary work', was presented as evidence of 'how women are progressing in every aspect of society in America and Europe'.³³ 'Erudite' women's participation in debates about religious philosophy in 'the Independent Religious Society of Boston, USA' and the presence of women on its governing body, was also praised as a mark of social progress. This report almost certainly refers to the Radical Club of Boston, which was founded in 1867 to act as a debating society on liberal religion and social reform, and numbered prominent Unitarian and Transcendentalist women among its members.³⁴

In selecting prominent western Unitarian women activists as role models for their wives and daughters, the Brahmo men involved in *Bamabodhini* thus encouraged Bengali women to envision wider social roles beyond becoming better educated wives and mothers who could exert good influence within reformed religious households. This was more than rhetoric, as reports in *Bamabodhini* reveal. By including a section on women's own writings, they opened up a space for women to publish and thus to have a voice in wider society, giving women an opportunity to articulate their own views on marriage and family life and on questions of education. Increased opportunities were also opened up for women to participate more actively and fully in Brahmo religious life beyond the home when, in 1865, Sen founded the Brahmila Samaj to give women the opportunity to engage in a weekly discussion of spiritual issues under his oversight.³⁵ By 1874, the 'emancipationist' wing of his supporters had successfully put pressure on him to end the custom of women sitting behind screens at the main mixed religious meetings.³⁶ In 1870, a long article entitled 'Bongiyo Stree Samaj' (Bengali Women's Society) urged women to set up their own organisation to improve women's position in society rather than rely on men who 'cannot fully comprehend the general needs of the women, and hence they cannot fully sympathize with them', wishing rather 'to mould their women in line with their own taste'. Setting up the example of English and American women who 'gather together to work like their men' and thereby accomplish 'great tasks', the writer exhorted:

O sisters of Bengal! Be conscious of your own conditions! Exhibit your enthusiasm and courage. The grounds for work are spread in front of you,

and the numerous doors leading to independence and happiness are open. Come together in unity and try improving your conditions.

Clearly the writer had hopes that Brahmo women, like Unitarian women in the west, could become a vanguard in progressing the position of women: he presented 'Our Brahmo sisters' as 'the foremost bearers of the torch of women's improvement in Bengal' and urged them 'to show their superior characters, and follow the ways of God through their own initiatives by forming a society for women'.³⁷ The article laid the ground for the formation in 1871 of the Bama Hitaisini Sabha (Women's Welfare Committee) as a forum for debate among women on improving their social position.³⁸ While Sen acted as President of the organisation, placing it firmly under male oversight, women's writings now moved into the main part of *Bamabodhini*, which carried reports on the debates in Bama Hitaisini Sabha sent in by its female secretary, Saudamini Khastogir.³⁹

Closely linked to this new society was a Normal School for Girls, set up by Sen to educate middle-class Bengali girls and train women teachers. In fact the period between the mid-1860s and the 1880s witnessed an amazingly fast trajectory of developments in Brahmo women's education. Brahmo women were among the first female university graduates in India, and the first Indian women to qualify and practice as doctors and teachers.⁴⁰ Pioneering figures included Kadambini Ganguly (née Basu), who in 1883 became one of Calcutta University's first female university graduates and went on to become Bengal's first female doctor.⁴¹ These rapid developments say much about the courage of some Brahmo women in breaking entrenched social taboos on female education and female independence. They also suggest the willingness of the more radical men associated with the Brahmo of India – including Kadambini's husband Dwarkanath – to encourage and support new roles for women. Finally, they are indicative of the success of *Bamabodhini* in widening the horizons and aspirations of its Bengali female readers – not least through presenting as role models Unitarian women in the vanguard of the women's movement in Britain and America.

The 'new' Bengali woman and the spectre of the 'strong-minded' woman

Western influence on Bengali women was not, however, seen as unproblematic by members of the Brahmo Samaj of India. Indeed, the appropriate relationship between approaches to the 'woman question' in 'east' and 'west' became increasingly contested within the organisation in the 1870s. A growing division between the 'emancipationist' wing, led by the journal's editor Umesh Chandra Dutta, and the 'paternalist' wing, led by Keshub Chunder Sen, developed in the context of the growth of cultural nationalism in Bengal, and attacks on western influence as leading to

‘denationalisation’. Initially, this was articulated in *Bamabodhini* as a concern among Brahmo women themselves about appropriate reformed styles of dress. In 1871, the journal published a report of a debate on dress reform among members of Bama Hitaisini Sabha, written by the society's secretary, Saudamini Khastogir. The women's group recognised that the traditional dress of semi-transparent sari worn without undergarments was a ‘huge obstacle’ to women's ‘progress’ and ‘social improvement’ because it prevented women from leaving the home to attend lectures on religion and philosophy and from ‘achieving anything in our society’. However, they expressed their opposition to copying English women's dress and their desire to fashion a ‘decent’ form of dress that would ‘suit our local condition’ and ‘give us a sense of identity’. Wearing western dress, they felt, would make them lose their self-respect as Indian women and become ‘unwelcome in our own society’, thus inhibiting their ability to influence ‘debates and arguments about our country's progress’.⁴²

Enthusiastic discussions of the public work of western religious liberal women like Carpenter, Martineau, Cobbe, Howe and Livermore in the journal between 1867 and 1871 had avoided any direct mention of their involvement in the growing transatlantic women's rights movement. However, in 1872, an article on ‘Social relations and rights of women’ for the first time drew the attention of the journal's Bengali women readers to the ‘different kinds of strong debates and revolutionary stances regarding society's relation to women and women's rights in most civilized contemporary Europe and America’ and noted that debates on the rights of women were also beginning in India.⁴³ In this context, the question of the purpose of improved education for Bengali women was raised. An article entitled ‘New Bengali Women’, probably written by Sen, noted approvingly that over the past twelve years ‘the new Bengali women have turned into strong characters and they have translated their words into practice and satiated their curiosity’. It recognised that Bengali women were no longer ‘the former Hindu women of the *antahpur*’. They ‘want to take on more responsibility’, were ‘happier to accompany their husbands to faraway places than to be in a joint family’, and ‘do not want to be uneducated and superstitious anymore’, nor treated badly if they were widows. However, the writer went on to express concern about where this wave of change was leading, asking: ‘Do our women really want to become Bibis?’ – Bibi being the term used for Indian women living as companions to British men. While the author asserted that this was not the case, he acknowledged that ‘it is not determined, yet, what they are becoming’, for ‘the only thing that is certain is the fact that they cannot be subjugated to ancient societal rules’. This current situation of flux and uncertainty, the writer suggested, was ‘the perfect time to have talks about new Bengali women's present situation and what the future might hold for them’. Seeking to shape the agenda of these talks in a way that addressed his concern that women might begin to neglect their household duties, he

questioned: 'women are becoming liberated and educated but how are they going to use this to care for the household, eradicate superstitions and embrace advanced religion?'⁴⁴

Sen's stress on the overriding importance of women's religious roles within the household led to a questioning of whether secular education along the lines promoted by his Unitarian collaborator Mary Carpenter was the right way forward for Indian women, or whether it would be better for Brahmos to set up their own schools which could educate girls in their own Brahmo religious beliefs. Secular education, the author of a 1873 article in *Bamabodhini* argued, was not appropriate for women: as mothers are responsible for the character-formation of their children, women needed to study religion so they were equipped to uphold the moral codes of Bengali society at a time when men were all going astray by adopting British culture and western norms of social behaviour, especially drinking.⁴⁵ Such concerns fuelled the conflict between Sen and English Unitarian educationalist Annette Akroyd. Akroyd, inspired by Sen's visit to England, arrived in Calcutta in 1873 determined to promote female education. *Bamabodhini*, expressing sadness in 1873 at hearing that Sen planned to resign from the position of honorary secretary of Annette Akroyd's school committee, laid the blame on Akroyd for proving herself unable to 'work with the real well-wishers of our nation'.⁴⁶ While they disliked Akroyd's high-handed approach, however, the journal's editor and other 'emancipationist' Brahmos disagreed with Sen's insistence on a separate domestic-focused educational syllabus for girls. As a result, they decided to support Akroyd's attempts to establish a more academically rigorous curriculum, and went on to take over the running of her school themselves following her marriage and withdrawal from educational work.⁴⁷

Concerned that 'new Bengali women' were moving too far from their traditional religious and domestic roles in the household, Sen's paternalist faction raised the spectre of the 'strong-minded woman'. In 1873, *Bamabodhini* published a long article entitled 'Women's Bizarre Advancement' that noted that there were women in England and America who are called 'strong-minded women', many of whom 'do not marry and thus their personalities become like men' and some of whom 'are strong atheists'. It quoted from an article in the English periodical *The Saturday Review* ridiculing such women who 'churn out fiery public speeches on women's advancement' but in fact 'want to trade their beauty to upper class men'.⁴⁸ The writer warned women readers in a patronising and paternalist tone of the current tendency to 'imitate the British in everything we do' and suggested that 'if we turn a blind eye towards our own judgements then many English transgressions would seep into Hindu women's society and destroy its innate purity'. Stressing that 'it is not respectable for women to lead a life without religious and moral regulations', the author claimed that 'our chaste

Hindu women clearly are petrified' by the spectre of such strong-minded women.⁴⁹

Ironically, some of the western liberal religious women that *Bamabodhini* had singled out as exemplars for Bengali women in earlier issues of the journal were the very women who were being attacked as 'strong-minded' in the western press at this period.⁵⁰ The writer attempted to reconcile his misogynist attack on independent women with this earlier praise by distinguishing so-called 'poisonous' women from 'a few who could challenge men in their education and knowledge' and who 'choose to remain unmarried and childless so they can devote themselves to the betterment of society'. The latter, he asserted, are 'goddesses whose lives are exemplary!' However, by deifying these women, he undermined the earlier approach of the journal: that of presenting such western women as more effective everyday role models than deified women from the Indian past. He also asserted that applying 'the Western idea of women's education' to India would lead women to aspire to be 'ignorant and arrogant "strong-minded women"' who will 'always be mercilessly ridiculed in our society'.⁵¹

Clearly Sen and his 'paternalist' faction of the Brahmo Samaj of India feared that, in promoting women's education, they had let the genie out of the bottle. Having hoped to furnish themselves with companionable, well-educated and religiously liberal wives, they were in danger of creating independent women who were no longer content to remain under patriarchal control within the household, and who might even reject religion altogether. Indeed, the journal retailed news that 'a Bengali lady lately delivered a lecture, or rather read a paper, in which she went so far as to say that women must go quite as far in the road to knowledge and power as men', and raised this question: 'Are we going to have "strong-minded women"...in our midst?'⁵²

Communications between Unitarian and Brahmo women

Brahmo men's control over women's responses to debates on the 'woman question' was also undermined by the growth of direct communications between Brahmo and Unitarian women. Ironically, this was set in train by Sen himself, through his visit to England in 1870 to drum up support from English women for improving Indian women's education and to gain western converts to his brand of theist religious universalism. *Bamabodhini* reported on the excitement generated by his visit, particularly among English women, and noted that at one of his meetings 'women stood up to deliver inspiring speeches' and 'their oratory astounded many in the audience'.⁵³ His visit to Mary Carpenter in Bristol led to the formation of the National Indian Association to foster support among British women for women's education in India. *Bamabodhini* also claimed that 'many religious women want to leave

their “dead” Christian religion and are praying to Keshub Babu to convert them to his “living” religion’, noting that he had delivered religious speeches in Unitarian chapels in London.⁵⁴ As a result, a committee headed by Unitarian social and political reformer William Shaen was set up to form a theistic society in London ‘as a means of uniting all those who believe in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man’, regardless of their religious backgrounds or national origins.⁵⁵ Sen's religious mission in England is striking evidence of the way in which transoceanic networks of liberal religion could involve genuine cross-cultural interchange rather than simply a uni-directional flow of influence from ‘west’ to ‘east’.

On his return to Calcutta, Sen launched a number of new social reform initiatives, including the formation of the Bama Hitaishini Sabha (Women's Welfare Committee), and acted as a conduit for the first exchanges of letters between Unitarian and Brahmo women. These developing contacts were reported with enthusiasm on the pages of *Bamabodhini*, which noted that Sen's visit ‘has inspired many scholarly and compassionate women to lend their hands towards the advancement of their sisters in India’ and that some ‘had even started learning Bengali so that their communication could run smoothly with their Indian sisters.’⁵⁶

Bamabodhini began publishing translations of letters from English women to Brahmo women. ‘Letter from England’, described as from an English ‘enthusiast for women's advancement’, was probably written by Elizabeth Sharpe, daughter of Samuel Sharpe, the President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, who had organised a formal welcome for Sen on his arrival in Britain. The letter thanked the Brahmo woman (who had apparently initiated the correspondence but whose name was also not published in *Bamabodhini*) for her letter and stressed their religious affinity: ‘we are the children of the same God’, even if we express this in different ways. The letter from Bengal had ‘made me feel deeply for my brothers and sisters who are so far away from me. It has brought me near to them’. Expressions of closeness across cultural and geographical divides combined with a positioning of English women as helpers to their less privileged Indian sisters. However, instead of positioning her Brahmo contact as a silent victim in need of saving – the classic evangelical missionary stance towards Indian women – Sharpe adopted an empowering tone, telling her not to underestimate her own sense of judgement and intelligence, stressing the value of her dedication to raising her children, urging her to gain further education and suggesting that she was ‘not as weak and helpless as you deem yourself to be’.⁵⁷ *Bamabodhini* also published letters to Brahmo women expressing enthusiasm about Sen's visit to England from May Hickson and E. Spears, wife of the Revd Spears, the secretary of the Unitarian Association who had organised Sen's lecture tour around Britain.⁵⁸

Bamabodhini also published part of a letter to a Brahmo woman from Sophia

Dobson Collet, 'a very erudite and religious woman'. A writer and feminist from a Unitarian family background, Collet had become fascinated by the Brahmo Samaj in the 1860s. When Sen came to England in 1870, she and Frances Power Cobbe were the first two people he visited in London, and she became the leading English promoter of Sen's writings on religion and social reform.⁵⁹ Her 1871 letter expressed her sense of religious affinity with Brahmos, stating that 'Even if I am a Christian, I feel immense love and respect for the Brahmos', and conveyed her desire to help the cause of Indian women through her writings.⁶⁰ In 1873, *Bamabodhini* published another letter from Collet, and praised her work in supporting Sen and Brahmoism, and her diligent study of Indian culture, moral codes and the current revolution in social progress. The letter was one Collet had written to the new secretary of Bama Hitaisini Sabha, Radharani Lahiri. The editors of *Bamabodhini* expressed amazement that she had written this letter in 'perfect handwriting and in precise Bengali', having worked very hard to learn the language, primarily so that she would 'be able to write letters to her sisters in Bengal so that the channel of communication could be direct and easy'. In her letter, Collet explained that she had been reading *Bamabodhini* for a while – and had found out about Bama Hitaisini Sabha after reading Lahiri's article on it in the journal: she was making contact in order to find out more about its work. She expressed her 'appreciation and deep sympathy for all of you who are devoting their time and energy for women's advancement in Bengal' and her 'earnest wish' that they succeeded. She also asked a number of questions: do women write the articles for the committee and read their own writings out, and will the journal be publishing these, and which articles in *Bamabodhini* were written by girls from the Female Normal School set up by Sen?⁶¹ Collet was clearly keen to establish how much the Committee was under women's direction and to read women's own writings. Thus, in Collet's case at least, we see a genuine appreciation of Brahmo women's own efforts to improve Indian women's lives, a major effort to engage with Bengali women in their own language, and an approach to members of Bama Hitaisini Sabha as fellow activists rather than passive recipients of western women's direction and aid. Her correspondent, Radharani Lahiri, was a leading figure in Brahmo women's associations through the 1870s and 1880s. While little is known of her personal life, she appears to have remained single, like Collet herself. Leading a life at odds with Sen's ideal of the educated Brahmo housewife, and perhaps closer to that of the western Unitarian women presented as role models in early issues of *Bamabodhini*, she devoted her life to improving the position of women through her associational work, her paid teaching and her writing.⁶²

In 1873, *Bamabodhini* also launched an English-language section of the journal in the hope that it would 'draw enlightened Native ladies in different parts of India into closer intercourse with each other and with their English sisters'.⁶³ Copies of the journal began to be sent to the National Indian Association in England, enabling other English women to find out about the

activities of Bengali women.⁶⁴ *Bamabodhini* also published a number of articles written especially for the journal by English women, including E. A. Manning, the Unitarian secretary of the London branch of the National Indian Association. These presented Bengali women with accounts of English family life and new developments in education and social welfare, including kindergartens and schools for the blind. Perhaps influenced by Sen, however, these articles cautiously avoided the issue of women's rights, despite the leading role Unitarian women were playing in the women's suffrage movement at this period.⁶⁵

Liberal religion and the 'woman question' between east and west

This study has highlighted the significance of transnational liberal religious networks in shaping debates on the 'woman question' in the nineteenth-century world. It has shown that debates on the position of women in colonial India cannot be reduced to a contest between evangelical Christian missionary and orthodox Hindu priest, or between westernised collaborator and cultural nationalist. Such interpretive frameworks close down the space for exploring the creative and constructive engagement with western religious liberals and social reformers by members of the Brahmo Samaj, an organisation which played a pioneering and influential role in promoting improvements to Indian women's education and social position. Brahmo connections with Unitarians were sustained outside official colonial channels and were based on the mutual perception of shared approaches to religion and social reform, and shared commitments to improving the position of women. As is evident in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, this led some Brahmo men to present to Bengali women as role models, not the Victorian housewives idealised by evangelical Christian missionaries, but rather Unitarian women who were pioneering full female engagement in the public sphere in Britain and the USA.

Such cross-cultural engagement in the context of British imperial domination of India was of course always problematic. However, it is clear from articles published in *Bamabodhini* in the early 1870s that Keshub Chunder Sen's growing conservatism on the 'woman question' was influenced not only by cultural nationalist concerns about Bengali women becoming 'denationalised' through imitating western women but also by the misogynist backlash in the west against the 'strong-minded woman'. It was within this transnational context of heightened contestation over the 'woman question' in both east and west that Sen opted to promote a domestic-focused educational curriculum for women that stressed their religious duties as Brahmo wives and mothers. As we have seen, other Brahmos, including *Bamabodhini*'s editor, engaged very differently with this ferment of debate, reaffirming an emancipatory agenda for women and promoting an academically rigorous secular education for girls which opened up avenues for women's entry into universities and professional

employment.

Dissension over the form that female education should take marked the beginnings of a split within Sen's organisation around the 'woman question'. The final schism was to come in 1878 when, in violation of the Brahmo Marriage Act of 1872 that abolished child marriage among Brahmos, Sen married off his thirteen-year-old daughter Suniti Devi to the maharajah of the princely state of Cooch Behar.⁶⁶ It was an action which sent shockwaves across the ocean: Sophia Dobson Collet, Frances Power Cobbe and other British feminists linked to Unitarian networks turned against Sen and allied themselves with the new organisation that emerged to represent the female emancipationist wing of Brahmoism, the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. This break with Sen, however, rather than marking an end of Brahmo-Unitarian connections, opened up a new chapter of cross-cultural co-operation when Sophia Dobson Collet took on the role of official record-keeper for this new female emancipationist wing of Brahmoism, as the London-based compiler of its yearbooks.⁶⁷ The nature of interchanges on liberal religion and the 'woman question' in this succeeding phase of connection awaits further research.

Bamabodhini Patrika continued under male editorship until 1922; long before its demise, *Antahpur*, the first Bengali women's journal to be edited by a woman, had been launched. Founded in 1898, its first editor was Banalata Debi, the daughter of Brahmo reformer and promoter of female education Sasipada Banerjee and his wife Rajkumari, who in 1871 had become the first Brahmo woman to travel overseas, staying with Mary Carpenter at Red Lodge in Bristol.⁶⁸ At about the same time that *Antaphur* was launched, Swarnakumari Debi (Ghosal), daughter of Brahmo leader Debendranath Tagore and a writer and campaigner for women's welfare, became editor of the leading Bengali literary magazine *Bharati*.⁶⁹ Along with Kadambini Ganguly, the pioneering Brahmo doctor mentioned earlier in this article, she was also one of the first women delegates to the Indian National Congress in 1889.⁷⁰ Further research is needed to explore the extent to which transnational networks of liberal religion and social reform and resulting east-west interchange on the 'woman question' remained significant to this new, increasingly politicised, generation of Brahmo women activists.

Notes

My thanks to Sahana Bajpaie Herrett, whose new set of translations from the Bengali-language journal *Bamabodhini Patrika* form this article's main evidential base, to Iftekhar Iqbal of the University of Dhaka for his initial identification of relevant articles in the journal, and to Abhijit Bhattacharya of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata, for alerting me to the availability of scanned text of the journal online at <www.savifa.uni-hd.de/thematicportals/periodicals/bamabodhini.html>. I am also grateful to the

participants in the workshop relating to this special issue, the anonymous reviewer of this article, and the special issue editors for their valuable suggestions.

- 1 For British and American Unitarians, see Jane Rendall, “‘A moral engine’? Feminism, Liberalism and the *English Woman's Journal*” in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 112–40; Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831–51* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760–1860* (Harlow: Addison, Wesley, Longman, 1998); Ruth Watts, ‘Rational Religion and Feminism: The Challenge of Unitarianism in the Nineteenth Century’, in Sue Morgan (ed.), *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 39–52; Dorothy May Emerson (ed.), *Standing Before Us: Unitarian Universalist Women and Social Reform 1776–1936* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2000); Cynthia Grant Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880–1930* (1990; Lincoln, NE: Universe, 2000); Cynthia Grant Tucker, *No Silent Witness: Three Generations of Unitarian Wives and Daughters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For Brahmos, see Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849–1905* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi University, 1983); Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849–1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 2 Herbert McLachlan, *The Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1934); Raymond V. Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* (1938; 2nd edn, London: Lindsey Press, 1952); Barbara Smith (ed.), *Truth, Liberty and Religion: Essays Celebrating Two Hundred Years of Manchester College* (Oxford: Manchester College, 1986). For Unitarianism in the USA, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805–1861* (1970; 2nd edn, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); C. Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Conrad Edick Wright, *American Unitarianism 1805–1865* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989); Douglas Stange, *British Unitarians against American Slavery, 1833–65* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1984).
- 3 David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Making of the Modern Indian Mind* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1996); Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (1915; 2nd edn, Calcutta: Sabharan Brahmo Samaj, 1974).

- 4 Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*; Spencer Lavan, *Unitarians and India: A Study in Encounter and Response* (1977; 2nd edn, Boston: Skinner House, 1983); Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition: The Teape Lectures* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt, 1993).
- 5 Lyn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- 6 Clare Midgley, 'Transoceanic Commemoration and Connections between Bengali Brahmos and British and American Unitarians', *Historical Journal* 54 (2011), pp. 773–96.
- 7 Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy*, pp. 73–96; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Antoinette Burton, 'Fearful Bodies into Disciplined Subjects: Pleasure, Romance, and the Family Drama of Colonial Reform in Mary Carpenter's "Six Months in India"', *Signs* 20 (1995), pp. 545–74; Clare Midgley, 'Mary Carpenter and the Brahmo Samaj of India: a Transnational Perspective on Social Reform in the Age of Empire', *Women's History Review* 22 (2013), pp. 363–85. See also Ruth Watts, 'Breaking the Bounds of Victorian Imperialism or Extending a Reformed Paternalism? Mary Carpenter and India', *History of Education* 29 (2000), pp. 443–56.
- 8 Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271–313; Mrinalini Sinha, 'Potent Protests: The Age of Consent Controversy, 1891', in her *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Many Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 138–80; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Himani Bannerji, 'Age of Consent and Hegemonic Social Reform', in Clare Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 21–44.
- 9 Ania Loomba, 'Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings on Widow Immolation in India', *History Workshop Journal* 36 (1993), pp. 209–27; Padma Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850–1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (eds), *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2008), Introduction, pp. 1–12; Tanika Sarkar, *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009).

- 10 Lavan, *Unitarians and India*, pp. 73–4.
- 11 Anne. C. Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830–1850* (1981; 2nd edn, Yale University Press, 1986); Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).
- 12 Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 13 Lavan, *Unitarians and India*, pp. 104–30; Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 249–86; Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 72–173; Sophia Dobson Collet (ed.), *Keshub Chunder Sen's English Visit* (London: Strahan & Co., 1871).
- 14 Unitarians were leading members of nineteenth-century New England political elites; they also played a key role in shaping British liberal politics. See John Seed, 'Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830–50', *Social History* 7 (1982), pp. 1–25; John Seed, 'Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800–50', in R. J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), pp. 108–56. For the role of Rammohun Roy in founding an Indian tradition of liberal political thought, see C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 15 For an excellent summary of the complexities of social reform in colonial India, and the development of scholarly debates in the field, see Sarkar and Sarkar (eds), *Women and Social Reform*, pp. 1–12.
- 16 Krishna Sen, 'Lessons in Self-Fashioning: *Bamabodhini Patrika* and the Education of Women in Colonial Bengal', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 37 (2004), pp. 176–91, esp. pp. 177, 189.
- 17 Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 1–30.
- 18 Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*; Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*; Sen, 'Lessons in Self-Fashioning'.
- 19 Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989).
- 20 *Bamabodhini Patrika* (BP) 1/1 (Sept.–Oct. 1863), pp. 1–2. Translated by S. Bajpaie Herrett from the scanned original located at <www.savifa.uni-hd.de/thematicportals/periodicals/bamabodhini.html>.
- 21 BP 1/1 (Sept.–Oct. 1863), pp. 2–7.

- 22 *BP* 1/2 (Oct.–Nov. 1863), pp. 17–20; *BP* 1/3 (Nov.–Dec. 1863), pp. 32–4.
- 23 Harriet Martineau, ‘Rajah Rammohun Roy on the Government and Religion of India’, *Monthly Repository*, new series, vol. 6 (1832), pp. 609–17; Gaby Weiner (ed.), *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 2 vols (1877; reprint of 3rd edn of 1877, London: Virago Press, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 155, 243. For discussion of Martineau's religious beliefs and her engagement with India, see Ella Dzelzainis and Cora Kaplan, *Harriet Martineau: Authorship, Society and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).
- 24 *BP* 1/2 (Oct.–Nov. 1863), pp. 17–20; *BP* 1/3 (Nov.–Dec. 1863), pp. 32–4.
- 25 *BP* 3/47 (June–July 1867), pp. 530–33.
- 26 *BP* 3/47 (June–July 1867), pp. 530–33.
- 27 Lori Williamson, *Power and Protest: Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Society* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2005), pp. 17–29. These included Frances Power Cobbe, *Essay on Intuitive Morals, Being an Attempt to Popularise Ethical Science* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855); Frances Power Cobbe, *Broken Lights: An Inquiry into the Present Condition and Future Prospects of Religious Faith* (London: Trubner & Co, 1864).
- 28 Frances Power Cobbe, ‘The Brahmo Samaj’, *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 76/440 (Aug. 1866), pp. 199–211; republished in Frances Power Cobbe, *Hours of Work and Play* (London: Trubner & Co, 1867), pp. 59–83.
- 29 *BP* 5/72 (Aug.–Sept. 1869), pp. 76–7.
- 30 *BP* 3/47 (June–July 1867), pp. 530–33.
- 31 *BP* 6/91 (Feb.–Mar. 1871), p. 334.
- 32 Mary Grant, *Private Woman, Public Person: An Account of the Life of Julia Ward Howe from 1819 to 1868* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1994); Wendy Hamand Venet, *A Strong-Minded Woman: The Life of Mary A. Livermore* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).
- 33 *BP* 9/123 (Oct.–Nov. 1873), p. 241.
- 34 *BP* 5/80 (Mar.–Apr. 1870), p. 237. For the Radical Club of Boston, see Versluis, *American Transcendentalism*, pp. 309–12.
- 35 Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, p. 105; *BP* 2/1 (Aug 1865), p. 24.
- 36 Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 35–6; *BP* 9/120 (July–Aug. 1873), p. 144.

- 37 *BP* 6/86 (Sept.–Oct. 1870), pp. 149–52.
- 38 Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, pp. 274–5; Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 17–18.
- 39 Saudamini was the daughter of Dr Ananda Charan Khastagir, a prominent member of the Brahmo Samaj of India. See Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, p. 124; Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*, p. 144.
- 40 For detailed discussions of these developments, much of it based on information culled from *BP*, see Sen, ‘Lessons in Self-Fashioning’, Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*; Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*.
- 41 Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, pp. 95, 242, 323–4, 341–2, 368.
- 42 *BP* 8/97 (Aug.–Sept. 1871), pp. 148–50. For fuller discussion of the issue of women and dress reform in Bengal, see Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*, pp. 241–9; Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, pp. 245–56.
- 43 *BP* 8/112 (Nov.–Dec. 1872), pp. 239–42.
- 44 *BP* 8/115 (Feb.–Mar. 1873), pp. 351–6.
- 45 *BP* 9/117 (Apr.–May 1873), pp. 3–8.
- 46 *BP* 9/118 (May–June 1873), pp. 61–3.
- 47 Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 37–9.
- 48 Attacks on ‘strong-minded’ women became common in both Britain and America from the mid-1850s but, interestingly, are not reported in *Bamabodhini* until the 1870s, suggesting selective appropriation of the discourse. See Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lautenbach Sheets and William Veeder, *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837–1883*, 3 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), vol. 3, pp. 89–94.
- 49 *BP* 9/119 (June–July 1873), pp. 69–72.
- 50 E.g., a series of articles appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1869 attacking Mary A. Livermore as a ‘selfish’ and ‘strong-minded’ woman because of her public advocacy of women’s legal and political rights; see Venet, *A Strong-Minded Woman*, p. 157.
- 51 *BP* 9/119 (June–July 1873), pp. 69–72.
- 52 *BP* 9/120 (July–Aug. 1873), p. 144. Unfortunately I have not yet been able to identify the woman who is being referred to here.

- 53 *BP* 5/79 (Feb.–Mar. 1870), p. 218; *BP* 5/81 (Apr.–May 1870), p. 54.
- 54 *BP* 5/81 (Apr.–May 1870), p. 54.
- 55 Collet (ed.), *Keshub Chunder Sen's English Visit*, esp. pp. 449–60: ‘Speech at a general meeting to promote the Formation of a Theistic Society, July 20, 1870’.
- 56 *BP* 6/88 (Nov.–Dec. 1870), pp. 231–4.
- 57 *BP* 6/86 (Sept.–Oct. 1870), pp. 170–72. My attribution of this letter to Elizabeth Sharpe is based on a translated letter from Sophia Dobson Collet published in the following issue of *BP*, which talks of being shown a letter to ‘Miss Sharpe’ from a Brahmo woman; *BP* 6/87 (Oct.–Nov. 1870), pp. 210–11. For Samuel Sharpe's formal welcome to Sen on his arrival in England, see Collet (ed.), *Keshub Chunder Sen's English Visit*, p. 3.
- 58 *BP* 6/88 (Nov.–Dec. 1870), pp. 236–7.
- 59 Sophia Dobson Collet (ed.), *The Brahmo Samaj: Lectures and Tracts by Keshub Chunder Sen*, 1st and 2nd series (London, 1870).
- 60 *BP* 6/87 (Oct.–Nov. 1870), pp. 210–11.
- 61 *BP* 9/124 (Nov.–Dec. 1873), pp. 258–60.
- 62 For further information on Radharini Lahiri, see Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, p. 371.
- 63 *BP* 9/117 (Apr.–May 1873), pp. 3–8.
- 64 *Journal of the National Indian Association in Aid of Social Progress in India* 34 (Oct. 1873), pp. 447–8 published a review of *BP* by ‘a Hindu contributor’, and the following volume (35 (Nov. 1873), p. 293) reported receipt of the July number of *BP* and noted progress in women's education, quoting statistics on girls schools in Bengal.
- 65 ‘An English Family’, *BP* 9/121 (Aug.–Sept. 1873), pp. 179–80; ‘Education of the Blind’, *BP* 9/126 (Jan.–Feb. 1874), pp. 339–40; ‘Child-Life in England’, *BP* 9/127–8 (Feb./Mar., Mar./Apr. 1874), pp. 398a–b; E. A. Manning, ‘Kinder Gartens’, *BP* 10/140 (Dec. 1874–Jan. 1875), pp. 387–8.
- 66 Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 324–9.
- 67 *The Brahmo Year-Book for 1876 (–1882)*, nos 1–7 (London, 1876–83).
- 68 Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, pp. 239–40.
- 69 Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, p. 373.
- 70 Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal*, p. 341.

3

Indeterminacy in Meaning: Religious Syncretism and Dynastic Historiography in the *Shannüren zhuan*

Yuet Keung Lo

This study examines the competing voices in the *Shannüren zhuan* 善女人傳 (Biographies of Good Women), a unique anthology of 150 Buddhist women's biographical accounts compiled and edited by the Confucian-turned-Buddhist Peng Jiqing 彭際清 (aka Peng Shaosheng 彭紹升, 1740–1796) to educate his daughters in the eighteenth century. The only one of its kind, the anthology details the lives of Buddhist laywomen of primarily the Chan and Pure Land faiths from the fourth to the eighteenth centuries CE, and it was prepared for the express purpose of Pure Land proselytisation.

The *Shannüren zhuan*

The *Shannüren zhuan* contains 150 biographies, spanning a history of almost fourteen centuries from the Eastern Jin in the fourth century to the mid-eighteenth century. While unmistakably Pure Land in doctrinal orientation, the historical approach of the anthology opens itself to accommodate Buddhist women of other persuasions than Pure Land. The most notable example is Chan practitioners. The 150 biographies in the anthology were based on sixty-two different literary sources. Among them are Buddhist histories, local gazetteers, miracle tales, secular literary collections and eyewitness accounts. Not surprisingly, none of them comes from a dynastic history, which, in the typical Confucian historiographical tradition, pays little attention to religious matters.¹

Peng himself did not write these biographies, except for a few 'eyewitness' accounts from his own times, which he penned himself, but in editing the volume, he clearly had some sort of gender perspective in mind.² He was interested in presenting these Buddhist laywomen as exemplars of religious sainthood befitting the female gender, as well as describing some of the practices that qualified them for spiritual enlightenment and deliverance.

Peng's selections seem to have been determined by two factors. First, they were historically determined by the popular school of the time. For instance, most biographies he chose from the Tang dynasty (seventh to tenth centuries)

deal with Chan practitioners and his post-Tang biographies are almost exclusively reserved for Pure Land women. The inclusion of laywomen of both Pure Land and Chan faith accurately reflects historical reality and aspires for comprehensiveness.³

Second, the selections were guided by Peng's own religious affinity to Pure Land Buddhism. Since Peng was a devoted Pure Land believer, it is natural that an overwhelming number of Pure Land women's biographies found their way into his collection. As will become clear, Peng's historical approach, perhaps unwittingly, opens up a battleground for an intrafaith contest of ideology through his very own narratives.

Read as a whole, the *Shannüren zhuan* not only provides sufficient information for us to draw a picture of the Buddhist world within the confines of Confucian domestication, but, upon careful analysis of the selections and the editorial stance embedded therein, it also rewards inquiry into Peng's own ideology as nurtured by his religious syncretism. This article examines the form and structure of the two categories of biographies and how they are sustained by different narrative voices. Consequently, the two categories of biographies would project two incongruous images of Buddhist women, competing for the reader's conversion. But these two categories of Buddhist women's biographies do share something in common; that is, they were both made to conform to the biographical tradition in Confucian historiography, which as a discursive structure underlying the *Shannüren zhuan*, also laid claim to the reader's aspiration.

Even as the Buddhist and Confucian historiographies jar with each other in the *Shannüren zhuan*, the biographical traditions of Chan and Pure Land Buddhism are also at variance in the anthology. As a result, three competing voices from three different yet related biographical traditions struggle to defend their integrity in the anthology purported to have a unified Pure Land vision of religious transcendence. Did the Buddhō-Confucian syncretist Peng Jiqing manage to sustain his Pure Land ideology in the form of dynastic biography he had chosen for his religious edification? What sort of ideal Buddhist woman would be presented in his didactic anthology? This paper argues that the jarring ideologies of Chan, Pure Land and Confucianism proved to be too discordant for the overstretched form of dynastic biography and the narrative strategy of syncretisation created a complicated paragon of Buddhist woman with a multi-layered identity commensurate with the three competing ideologies. To reach such conclusions, we must first make an acquaintance of the person who orchestrated the narrative contest of ideologies.

The editor

Peng Jiqing was born into a scholar-official family of long standing in

Changzhou County 長州 (modern-day Suzhou 蘇州) of Jiangsu 江蘇. His grandfather, father and brothers entered the government bureaucracy upon their success in the civil service examination. Peng himself also earned a *jinshi* 進士 (presented scholar) degree before he turned twenty.

When he was young, Peng concentrated on studying the Confucian classics and their commentaries, and he admired scholars of high integrity in the past. As Richard Shek points out, Peng was eclectic in his espousal of Confucian doctrines. For example, he believed that the Cheng-Zhu 程朱 and Lu-Wang 陸王 schools of Neo-Confucianism both shared the transmission of the essence of the teachings of the early sages and were not meant to be exclusive of each other; the debate between their advocates in Qing times did not mean much to him.⁴ Peng's early inclination to eclecticism in Confucianism seems to have predetermined his later syncretic approach to blending Confucianism with Buddhism.

Through the introduction of a friend, Peng had the opportunity to hear of the Buddhist teachings and was convinced of the compatibility of Buddhism and Confucianism. At the age of thirty, Peng was offered an official post, but he turned it down. In 1773, at the age of thirty-four, he took the vows of a lay Buddhist and lived as a celibate and vegetarian. He gave himself the epithet Master Zhigui 知歸子 (Knowing Where to Return) and vowed to be reborn in the Pure Land.⁵ In 1775, one year after the Qing government banned the system of ordaining monks and nuns, he finished his compilation of the *Jushi zhuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Laymen) in fifty-six scrolls, which contains 312 biographies of Buddhist laymen, including himself. In these biographies, Peng traces the history of the Pure Land faith in China as well as his own conception of the ideal lay Buddhist.⁶ In 1784, his father died and Peng retired to a temple to devote his remaining years in religious contemplation.⁷

The compilation of first the *Jushi zhuan* and later the *Shanniüren zhuan*, while motivated by Peng Jiqing's personal interest in Pure Land Buddhism and his Buddhio-Confucian syncretism, was certainly inseparable from the general Buddhist ethos among the literati from late Ming (sixteenth century) to early and middle Qing times (eighteenth century). Beginning with the Song in the tenth century, lay Buddhism began to gain popularity. We witness a number of Buddhist anthologies detailing the allegedly successful deliverance of lay Buddhists from the mundane world. Lay Buddhism became so popular in the Song that Chinese literati, regardless of their religious orientation, developed a predilection to address themselves by the Buddhist term *jushi* 居士 (layman). Towards the end of Ming until the middle Qing, lay Buddhism witnessed its heyday, especially in the south.

Intellectually, the growing tendency of Buddhio-Confucian syncretism provided the greatest impetus.⁸ Late Ming Confucian thinkers like Yang Qiyuan 楊起元 (1547–1599), who firmly believed in the unity of Confucianism and Buddhism, hailed that ‘Confucius and Mencius are the

Śākyamunis of China'.⁹ Judith Berling, in her pioneering study of religious syncretism in China, saw the sixteenth century as the 'heyday of syncretism' and she said, 'Never before or since in Chinese history did syncretism have so open and pervasive an impact on all levels of the religious imagination'.¹⁰

Politically, the transition from Ming to Qing humbled the cultural pride of many a Chinese intellectual who felt morally obliged to defend an empire that they thought legitimately belonged to Han Chinese. When they were realistically unable to keep the Manchus out of the Middle Kingdom, many of them estranged themselves from the political arena to seek consolation in the Buddhist faith.¹¹ Many more chose to escape to Buddhism in order to 'nurture their persons in preparation for a worthy cause' (*yang qi shen yi you wei 養其身以有為*).¹² Furthermore, beginning in 1736, the Qianlong emperor decreed that women under the age of forty were forbidden to become nuns, and in 1774 the system of ordaining monks and nuns was abolished altogether.¹³ Thus the avenue for pursuing a monastic life was officially prohibited. For men and women who wanted to practise Buddhism, the only option left was to practise the religion at home as a layperson. Thus, the number of lay Buddhists rose and there began to appear many anthologies that detailed the practices of lay Buddhists. Nurtured by such an intellectual and political climate for over a century, readers in the mid-eighteenth century were absorbed in a cultural ethos that would find Peng's *Jushi zhuan* and *Shannüren zhuan* a timely reading and an added encouragement.

Peng Jiqing compiled the *Shannüren zhuan* to exhort his two daughters to the Pure Land faith, but the audience for the collection was not limited to his own family.¹⁴ Peng stated that he would circulate the collection widely to all sentient beings.¹⁵ In particular, he made it clear that he compiled it for the benefit of all women in the world. Both the *Shannüren zhuan* and the *Jushi zhuan* enjoyed broad circulation outside Peng's own family circle and remained popular long after their publication.¹⁶

Religious syncretism

One of the reasons for this popularity was Peng Jiqing's Buddho-Confucian syncretic vision of religiosity, which guided his editing of the *Shannüren zhuan*. While this syncretic vision is complex in all its philosophical ramifications, fundamentally, it centres on the idea of recovering through the Buddhist practice of *nianfo* 念佛 our 'strayed mind' (*qiu fangxin* 求放心), that is originally good. This fundamental idea informs almost the entirety of the *Shannüren zhuan*, particularly the biographies of the Pure Land women.¹⁷

In Peng's usage, *nianfo* refers to both the chanting of Amitābha Buddha's name and being mindful of Amitābha Buddha – it is the most common practice of the good women in the *Shannüren zhuan*. The idea of *qiu fangxin* comes from the moral philosophy of the early Confucian master Mencius. To

Mencius, the human mind is innately good, and it is only selfish desires that becloud its good nature. A mind so beclouded is called a 'strayed mind'. Peng held a similar view, and he asserted that 'to seek the strayed mind is the correct effort that is most important to both Confucianism and Buddhism'.¹⁸ From the soteriological perspective, an enlightened mind, or the strayed mind we recover, is the mind of perfect wisdom; it is where we find the Pure Land; it is indeed the Buddha.¹⁹ The best way to recover our strayed mind is to cultivate filial devotion because filial devotion, Peng argues, is innate in our mind. And the best way to cultivate filial devotion *xiao* 孝 is to practise *nianfo*. Peng says, 'In serving heaven and earth and ghosts and spirits, there is no better way than being filial to one's parents... Therefore, to practise *nianfo* is to be pious to one's parents; filial devotion to one's parents essentially is the same as filial devotion to the Buddha'.²⁰

In what must have been a revolutionary declaration in his time, Peng even went so far as to claim that calling upon the name of Amitābha Buddha by chanting the mantra 'Nan-wu A-mi-tuo-fo' 南無阿彌陀佛 (Homage to Amitābha Buddha) is tantamount to the extension of innate knowledge (*zhi liangzhi* 致良知) and the preservation of the Heavenly Principle (*cun tianli* 存天理) – which are respectively the cultivation and telos in Neo-Confucian moral metaphysics.²¹ For Peng, *nianfo*, then, encapsulates the essence of Neo-Confucian moral philosophy; it covers both cultivation and telos, and, in practice, links the mundane to the transcendent. As such, *nianfo* becomes the practice that reconciles any disparity in Confucian moralism and Buddhist transcendence, and couples the Mencian doctrine of the moral mind with the gateway to Pure Land paradise.²²

From this brief synopsis of Peng Jiqing's intellectual background, it is clear that he was a devout Pure Land Buddhist, and so it is no surprise that the majority of the biographies in his collection belong to Pure Land women. But there are Chan women's biographies in the collection as well. What is their role there? How do they contribute to Peng's Buddho-Confucian syncretism? Do they form a coherent whole with the Pure Land women's biographies to lend ideological integrity to the *Shannüren zhuan*? Or do they represent a different Buddhist discursive tradition that could vitiate Peng's ecumenical project of Pure Land Buddhism? How do these two competing Buddhist voices relate to the Confucian medium that facilitates their religious expressions?

To understand the competing claims by these three different biographical traditions on the ultimate truth of the *Shannüren zhuan*, we need to unpack, at least briefly, the three discursive traditions individually and examine how they were integrated in the collection. Given that it was the dynastic biography that Peng Jiqing relied on in his attempt to reconcile the Chan and Pure Land women's biographies, let us first examine the structure of the literary form of dynastic biography.

Literary form: structures and strictures

Beginning with Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145–85 BCE) monumental history *Shiji* (Record of the Grand Historian), the annals-and-biographies tradition (*jizhuan ti* 紀傳體) was firmly established in Chinese historiography and would become the model of narrative structure for all dynastic histories. Given his Confucian outlook, Sima Qian followed the Confucian literary dictum that literature should serve as a vehicle for moral truth. The biographical narratives he wrote were usually loaded with evaluative language and moral judgments, and the biographical tradition his work inspired was characteristically moralistic.²³ Thus a biography is included in the dynastic histories because its subject usually demonstrates or illustrates, in one way or another, certain moral values that could be identified in the Confucian doctrine, and the biographical subject is chosen to provide precepts and examples of approved or disapproved moral conduct for the reader.²⁴ Dynastic biography, then, can, in one of its capacities, function as a vehicle for rewarding good conduct and condemning moral deviancy.

By virtue of their generic inclination to public edification, a majority of the dynastic biographies are written about public figures, especially government officials. In them, details about the biographical subjects' private lives are usually lacking. In contrast, details about the private life are, at best, asides only to be picked up by an inquisitive soul who wants to bring coherence to the private and the public in a biography. The subjects in the individual biographies often lack a distinct personal identity. Thus personality is often marginalised by the impersonal ethos of history, and such marginalisation is embedded in the narrative structure in Chinese dynastic biographies.

A dynastic biography typically consists of three sections: 1) a preliminary section that provides the information about the subject's family and his ancestry; 2) an outline of the subject's official career, 'presented in the form of [his] successive official appointments, promotions, his titles, honors, enfeoffments'; and, 3) the death of the subject and the posthumous honours accorded him, and usually a brief account of his descendants.²⁵ Usually, the section that contains the outline of the career of the official is the main body of the biography. This is where the historian would describe the actions of the person in his official capacity, and as such, it is what defines the whole biography and its subject.

The biographical formula in dynastic histories, when it concerns female subjects other than imperial consorts, usually takes the form of a collective biography under the category of *lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Women). The *lienü zhuan* category in dynastic histories originated from the earliest collection of women's biographies entitled *Lienü zhuan* compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–76 bce). Beginning with the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Latter Han History), the *lienü zhuan* had become a regular component in

almost every dynastic history.²⁶ Women with exemplary virtues, womanly conduct or moral insights are included in this collective biography. Once included, the women became moral models to be emulated. Since most, if not all, of these women did not have an official career, episodes from their personal lives take the place of the career section that usually appear in a male official's biography. And the narrative events in these episodes encompass the exemplary qualities that qualify those women to be included in the collective biography.

Let us look at one example from the *Lienü zhuan* in the *Jinshu* 晉書 (Jin History).

Concerning Madam Yan and Madam Xue, both concubines of Zhang Tianxi, no one knew about their provenances. They were both Tianxi's favourites. When Tianxi was bedridden with an illness, he said to them,

‘How would the two of you pay back my affection? You would not marry someone else when I am gone, would you?’

‘If our lord passed away’, the concubines said in unison, ‘we would also kill ourselves so that we may continue to serve you in the netherworld. We swear our loyalty to you!’

When his illness became critical, the two concubines slit their throats. However, Tianxi later recovered. Grieved by the memories of them, he buried them in a ritual befitting a wife.²⁷

This *lienü* biography fits the women's biographical formula perfectly. First, there is a brief note on the concubines' provenances, although in this case it is presented in the form of a lack. Then in the main body of the biography we have the dialogue that takes place by Tianxi's sickbed and that demonstrates the loyalty of the concubines. In the third and last section, we have the end of the concubines' lives, which, notably, are not presented as something to be grieved over. Their sacrifice is acknowledged and rewarded by their husband. Although the two concubines occupy the focal position throughout the biographical account, they do not seem to see themselves as central characters who can shape their own identity and conduct their own lives. Rather, they find their identity through marriage and their intimacy with their common husband. The meaning of the two concubines' lives is validated by their sacrifice to their husband, and that is precisely the reason they were written into history.

Refashioning the Buddhist women's lives in the form of *zhuan* (biographical account) in the *Shannüren zhuan* was a deliberate choice on Peng Jiqing's part. Peng himself suggested that he had intended to establish a tradition of writing about Buddhist laywomen in China by editing the *Shannüren zhuan*. In his Prologue to the *Shannüren zhuan*, he proposed that Buddhist women of firm resolve to ‘terminate the stream of birth-and-death’ be also included to

complement the *lienü* tradition. No doubt Peng was aware of the *lienü* biographical tradition in the course of Chinese history, and he must also have realised the tremendous power of this *lienü* biographical tradition as a moral discourse. In all likelihood, the *Shannüren zhuan* was inspired by the model of Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan*.²⁸ Like the *Lienü zhuan*, for example, the *Shannüren zhuan* was also based on a variety of diverse sources from earlier times.

As there are two main Buddhist traditions, Pure Land and Chan, represented in the collection, there are also two corresponding sets of biographies therein governed by different discursive structures. By and large, both types of biographies were tailor-made to fit the form of dynastic biographies, though with varying degrees of success. Let us examine the Pure Land women's biographies first.

Formulaic narrative in the Pure Land women's biographies

The Pure Land women's biographies are formulaic and characterised by the women's genteel meekness. Structurally, the Pure Land women's biographies are parallel to the *lienü* biographies in the Confucian tradition; both share a tripartite biographical formula and are told in a third-person narration. The structure of the Pure Land's women's biographies can be analysed as follows: 1) the provenance of the subject, her family background, and her family life (if any); 2) the subject's Buddhist practices; 3) the death and thus spiritual liberation of the subject, usually after her own prediction of the date of her demise, and the miracle subsequent to the subject's death (if any).

Just as a historian would add descriptions of the actions and/or literary writings of his biographical subject to fill out the public life of the latter (if he was a male official), the biographer of Pure Land women's biographies would typically enhance the bare outline with his subject's miraculous experiences (usually her extraordinary visions, and/or her dreams), although citations of the woman's poetry writings are equally common.²⁹ In other cases, sufficient details of the religious conduct and idiosyncratic actions of the biographical subject would be furnished to highlight her religious fervour, and conventional topoi of personality traits and propensities are not lacking. With the constraints of traditional historiography, both dynastic biographies and the Pure Land women's biographies, then, were to prescribe and circumscribe personal space and sphere of activity of the biographical subjects, and thus define the meaning of their lives. A double straitjacket of ideology and narrative structure thus restrained and confined the lives of the Pure Land women when they were represented in the form of biography in the *Shannüren zhuan*.

Like dynastic biographies, the Pure Land women's biographies are all told by a third-person narrator. Revealing information about his biographical subjects

by concealing, the omniscient third-person narrator manipulates the reader in her understanding of the text. Untrammelled by time and space, the third-person narrator can even gain access to the psychic world of his narrated women and articulate at will their unverbilised thoughts and motives and, more importantly, erase at the same time those which might have been most interesting to us but discordant to the storyteller's narrative purpose. As the third-person narrator sketches the lives of the Pure Land women as he wishes, the first-person truths of the Pure Land women, then, are rendered hopelessly voiceless at the mercy of his omniscience. The biographical subjects thus presented are limited, circumscribed spiritual automatons of practically selfsame identity.

Subjective experience ordinarily is not expected, and it is largely absent in the Pure Land women's biographies. But the Pure Land women's biographies pivot on the biographical subjects' subjective experience of miracles as the apotheosis of the Pure Land faith. Thus, occasionally subjective experience is revealed in the women's visions of the Pure Land or their journeys thither. Or, still it may be revealed in the women's dream experience involving a miraculous encounter with Amitābha Buddha. All these fantastic experiences are full of an earnest mystical longing for the bliss in the Pure Land, expressed in material yet unearthly symbols of beauty, refreshing tastes, odours and music.

The subjectivity of the miracle involves a shift of narrative voice in the visionary experience and dream experience. The third-person narrator disappears as suddenly as the miracle takes place, and then the first-person narrator emerges whose presence is to underscore the subjective nature of the miraculous experience. For a moment, the biography becomes almost autobiographical because the biographical subject is now free from the authority of the implied author as well as her ordinary, mundane existence, which is now totally negated. But the escape from the domesticated existence is as brief as the miracle lasts.

Subjective experience appears to be irrelevant to Peng Jiqing's vision of exemplary Buddhist woman. To be exemplary seems to imply that a woman's spiritual experience not only must be amenable to public scrutiny, but should also be experienced with public witnesses around. While the miraculous experiences of the biographical subjects are presumably subjective, there is not one single miracle in the Pure Land women's biographies that can bear a personal signature on it. Rather, a miracle is often described as a shared experience. In many of the Pure Land women's biographies, the miracle is presented as a public scene that a multitude of people also witness. Furthermore, however unique the miracle the woman might encounter, the experience itself is always described in conventional topoi bound by a rigid literary structure. In fact, the experience is so rigidly structured that it becomes a predictable formula and an inflexible tradition.

Narrative closure is a final literary feature of the Pure Land women's biographies – a feature that sets them in sharp contrast to its absence in the Chan women's biographies.³⁰ It seems typical of the Pure Land women's biographies to reach a denouement in which the biographical subject would predict her hour of death and bid her farewell to her family and relatives. Symbolically, the narrative closure may be suggestive of the kind of domesticated religiosity embraced by the Pure Land women in their exemplary biographies.

Truncated narrative in the Chan women's biographies

While the Pure Land women's biographies are formulaic, the Chan women's biographies in the collection are truncated. By and large, they do not conform to the tripartite discursive structure of dynastic biographies. Measured against the template of dynastic biographies, structural disparities abound in the Chan women's biographies.

First, the provenance of the biographical subject, *de rigueur* in dynastic biographies, is usually lacking in the Chan women's biographies. When furnished, the information is never relevant or, at least, seems extraneous. The lack of the information seems to suggest that personal history and social background are irrelevant to these women's Chan experience. Second, the main body of the biography too seems to be lacking. We are not told about the Buddhist practice the biographical subject engaged in, nor do we get a coherent picture of the chronology of the highlights of her life. Even more curiously, family life is almost never mentioned and the Chan woman is never burdened by any family obligations. It seems as if family life and Chan cultivation are mutually exclusive. The meaning of a Chan woman's life, then, does not appear to be anchored in any particular event in her life, which consists of a sequence of spiritual experiences and simply unfolds spontaneously within the confines of her biography. The events in her life are not even narrated in a chronological order. The sense of time and history is simply missing. Third, there is not any formal conclusion to a Chan woman's life in her biography. In most of the Chan women's biographies, even the deaths of the subjects are not mentioned at all as if death does not define or conclude a Chan woman's life. The obvious attempt to erase time in her biography renders a historical event into an ahistorical experience and would thereby seem to facilitate the reader of the biography to participate in the timeless spiritual experience of the Chan woman. From the narrative perspective, the biographies as a whole also evoke a strong sense of narrative anarchy that suggests the spiritual independence of the Chan women.

If there is one feature that distinguishes a Chan woman's biography from the dynastic woman's biography, it is the heavy use of dialogue. In other words, it

is dialogue, rather than events in the life cycle of the woman that constitutes the essence of a Chan woman's biography. One may say that the meaning of a Chan woman's life is defined by the level of enlightenment demonstrated in the recorded dialogues she has with a Chan master, usually a reputable male of high spiritual calibre. In fact, in most Chan texts, the locus of religious endeavour is not seated on meditation practice, of whatever style, but engagement in these dialogue-events.³¹ As John McRae calls it, the narratives that capture such dialogue-events are 'encounter dialogues' and 'the practice of encounter dialogue derived much of its creative energy from the iconoclastic rejection of traditional Buddhist formulation of the spiritual path' since the importance of seated meditation was undermined, if not replaced.³²

In Chan literature, the Chan master is usually the one who determines how the encounter dialogue develops, and hence he usually finishes the dialogue by dealing a punishing blow, physically and/or metaphorically, to the other party. In Peng Jiqing's anthology, the encounter dialogues are usually *confrontational*. But it appears that Peng selected only those vignettes in which the woman inquirer always initiates the dialogue and seemingly takes command of it. The Chan woman typically would challenge the Chan master she encounters. More often than not, she usually comes out as the 'winner'. Her unique spiritual understanding is explicitly or implicitly endorsed by the master(s) she meets, and that endorsement seems to be the defining moment of her life. All in all, one gets the impression that a Chan woman is defined from within, not from without.

Given the episodic nature of the Chan women's biographies, the biographical narrative is usually not woven in a linear fashion; rather, it typically consists of a string of seemingly discrete, independent dialogue-events developing on an atemporal plane. These dialogue-events represent different points of view from that of the integrated third-person narrator in the dynastic biographies and the Pure Land women's biographies. Consequently, they break down the univocal discursive structure of dynastic biographies.

Instead of having a third-person narrator dominating the entire narrative from start to finish, the Chan women's biographies typically consist of a third-person narrative, interspersed with dialogues in first-person narration. Although the Chan women's biographies are also told by a third-person narrator, the lives of the biographical subjects are actually portrayed and shaped *from* the subjects' own viewpoints. Rather than structuring a Chan woman's life after the pattern of the biography of a male public figure, the overall structure of a Chan woman's biography merely provides a framework in which to situate the dialogue-events that give meaning to the life of the biographical subject. Thus, the entire biography told by a third-person narrator can be read as a frame narrative, a vehicle created to contain the essential dialogues uttered in first-person narration by the biographical subject with minimal authorial mediation.

With the aid of the first-person narration, the characters and lives of the Chan women are allowed to come through in all the seemingly bizarre encounters and dialogues that were inspired spontaneously. The result is that in these biographies we do not find a narrator writing his subjects. Rather, the subjects appear to speak for themselves and narratively shape their own lives. Nothing seems to have been premeditated or mediated. To the Chan biographer, life is never predictable, nor can spontaneous experiences be slotted into neat and preconceived categories. If stylistic features convey ideology and values, the writing of the Chan women's biographies certainly makes a good case of the perfect marriage between ideology and narrative. If Chan as a philosophy of life is anti-authoritarian, the stylistic adoption of the evasive authorial stance in the Chan women's biographies would be consistent with the independent spirit of the biographical subjects and underscores the subjective nature of their spiritual experiences.³³

Some critical remarks

Is there any coherence and unity to the three discursive structures and the two seemingly competing images of Buddhist women in the *Shannüren zhuan*? The first question one may ask perhaps is: why are there two different exemplars of Buddhist women? A simple answer is that beginning with the late Ming in the sixteenth century until the mid-Qing in the eighteenth, a strong current of intrafaith syncretism between Chan Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism was in vogue. Many monks from this period were well trained in both traditions. In fact, as mentioned earlier, interfaith syncretism between Buddhism and Confucianism was also very popular in the same period. Peng's inclusion of women of Chan and Pure Land was very much in keeping with his religious milieu. More important, however, is his Buddhio-Confucian syncretism which guided his editing of the *Shannüren zhuan*.

We know that Peng was a devout Pure Land Buddhist, so understandably the majority of the biographies in his collection detail Pure Land women's lives. There are only nineteen Chan women's biographies. By his own admission, Peng compiled the *Shannüren zhuan* to exhort his two daughters and all women in the world to the Pure Land. Peng's objective in writing these biographies was to provide a Buddhist exemplar of women, and that intention is more religious than historical in its motivation. We have no reason to question his Pure Land ecumenism.

Yet given this singular goal in the *Shannüren zhuan*, we now know that there are three distinct, yet at times dissonant, voices representing three competing discourses informed by three different biographical traditions or discursive genres in the collection, namely, dynastic biography, specifically exemplified by the Confucian *lienü* biographies, Chan women's biographies, and Pure Land women's biographies. The tension among these disparate biographical

traditions thus creates an ambiguous meaning structure in Peng Jiqing's ecumenical project. How did he reconcile such ideological dissonance if it was possible at all?

As it turns out, Peng's syncretic aspiration compelled him to institute a uniform horizon to unify the diversity of discourse in his collection. As the editor, he had the privilege of ironing out any inconsistencies in the sources of the biographies to serve one common goal, namely the awakening of faith, among women readers, in the authenticity of the Pure Land and their own capability to attain rebirth there. And his method was to homogenise all his original sources as well as the plurality of discursive structures.

For instance, Peng routinely modified the details and sometimes even the accuracy of his sources. We learn from *Xianguo suilu* 現果隨錄 (Random Jottings about Immediate Retribution), the source for Biography 118, that Madam Wu 吳氏 had 'a violent temper but she was particularly fond of Buddhism'.³⁴ Apparently, Peng found a violent temper incongruous with, on the one hand, a love for the Buddhist teaching and on the other, his own image of 'good women', so he deleted the phrase that describes Wu's Buddhist interest. As a result, Wu becomes another clone of the ideal prototype of Buddhist woman in Peng's vision of syncretism. Similarly, Madam Xu 徐氏 in Biography 123 is described in the source to have not observed the vegetarian diet.³⁵ Again, seeing this as an apparent inconsistency with Xu's otherwise sincere devotion to the Pure Land faith, Peng deleted this detail from his own version of her biography. In general, Peng would edit out from his sources all the details that are incongruous with, or irrelevant to, the Buddhist faith of his biographical subjects. These details usually include the biographical subject's daily activities, her literary aspirations or accomplishments, or her relationships with other people in her family or her community. Moreover, because of Peng's professed preference for Pure Land over Chan, he sometimes even went so far as to edit out of the source the explicit mention of the biographical subject's interest in Chan.³⁶

On the other hand, numerous examples also show that when the source does not provide sufficient specific details about the woman's Buddhist practice, Peng would furnish them in a way that would be consistent with the given details in the source. Typically, he would add a typical if colourless line that says 'all her life, she chanted the name of Amitābha Buddha'.³⁷ But sometimes his editorial insertions were completely motivated by his Buddhō-Confucian syncretism. For instance, in Biography 80, the source mentions that Nun Sankong 三空道人 'aspired to manly ambitions' (*zhangfu zhi* 丈夫志) 'since she was young and she never yielded her will to the wealthy and the powerful'.³⁸ This detail was deleted in Peng's literary processing presumably because Sankong's ambitions were too 'manly'.

In Biography 38, Peng interlards two significant lines to the source he edits. After the biographical subject was converted to the Pure Land faith, Peng

inserts the following: 'She took charge of the domestic affairs again as usual. However, she did not abandon her cultivation of pure karma'.³⁹ Clearly, this stylistic flourish is more than a cosmetic touch. The editor here doubles as a matchmaker to marry Confucian family virtues and Buddhist spiritual aspirations. And the perfect daughter out of this wedlock is probably the wife of Wen Jingwen 溫靜文 in Biography 20. Her biography tells us that three days before her death, lotus blossoms as huge as the wheel-like sun appeared before her. When her final day came, she prepared a meal for her parents, and said, 'I am fortunate to be able to be reborn in the Pure Land in this lifetime. I hope father and mother and my husband will all devote yourselves to the chanting of the name of Amitābha Buddha; thus we will be able to see one another again'.⁴⁰ The Utmost Bliss in the Pure Land paradise will be incomplete without a happily reunited family – a notion not found in any of the foundational scriptures in Pure Land Buddhism. Thus changing the details at the micro level facilitated the fusing of Buddhist faith and Confucian virtues.

But the homogenisation affects the structural level as well. For example, almost none of the original sources were written as biographies and, for that reason, very few of them were actually structured after the literary convention of a dynastic biography. To sharply redefine the women subjects of his sources, Peng Jiqing, superimposing a formal unity onto the narratives of his sources, made each of them conform to a narrative formula called biography (*zhuan* 傳). As a result, the varied narrative styles in the original sources were homogenised, and consequently so were the lives of his biographical subjects, with the resistant exception of the Chan women's biographies.

Likewise, the articulation of their lives is also controlled, because the homogenisation goes beyond the structural level to affect the polyphonic points of view in the original sources, and this is particularly true in the Pure Land women's biographies. The polyphony of narrative viewpoints in the original sources is now all unified by the omniscient third-person narrator provided by the editor. In the end, Peng's narrative homogenisation in effect creates only two types of 'good woman' character in the collection: one represents the Chan women and the other the Pure Land women. And within each type, we have the selfsame character for the Buddhist woman in almost every single one of the 'good women' biographies.

How successful were Peng's editorial efforts? As we have seen, the Pure Land women's biographies are perfectly congruous with the Confucian *lienü* biographies, both in form and in spirit. It is easy for the reader to see the integration of Confucian domestic virtues into Pure Land Buddhist transcendence, and relatedly Peng was quite successful in creating a Buddhist *shannüren* discourse to complement the Confucian *lienü* discourse, as he had claimed to do.

Interestingly, Chan enlightenment and Pure Land devotion were not well

syncretised in the two sets of Buddhist women's biographies in the collection. While, doctrinally, Chan and Pure Land might continue to merge in intrafaith syncretism in Peng's own time, tension exists between the two doctrines in his *Shannüren zhuan* and it reveals itself in the character, lifestyles and images of the women who embody them. Structurally, in spite of Peng's narrative homogenisation, the Chan women's biographies are simply at odds, both in form and structure as well as in spirit, with the Pure Land women's biographies, which are modelled upon the Confucian *lienü* biographies. The mapping over is just incongruous.

Peng's draconian approach to editing notwithstanding, in the end we are still left with what Bakhtin might call heteroglossia, where ideological incongruities and narrative differences of competing discourses remain potent, and it is not clear whether a unitary identity of Buddhist laywomen is in view. If Chan women and Pure Land women are flat characters in their respective biographies, the ideal Buddhist woman constructed in the *Shannüren zhuan* does have a multi-layered identity informed by different narrative traditions and competing discursive strategies.

Appendix I: two samples of Pure Land women's biographies

Biography 114 Madam Li 李氏⁴¹

Madam Li was the mother of Liu Daolong 劉道隆. At the age of forty, she became a vegetarian and converted to Buddhism. She reserved a quiet chamber to worship Bodhisattva Guanyin. Day and night she worshipped Guanyin and chanted the name of the Buddha one thousand times. Even the severe cold of winter and the stifling heat of summer could not interrupt her practice. She also printed the *Diamond sūtra* and distributed it for free. Whenever her birthday came, she would warn her sons and daughters-in-law not to prepare wine for her. Rather, she would insist on doing ritual repentance for a day or three days. Thus, her life went on for twenty-five years.

The year before she died, she invited some monks over to chant the scriptures for seven days and nights. One night, she dreamed that the Bodhisattva she worshipped came to her with a string of white beads in hand. As the Bodhisattva was offering the rosary to Madam Li, she said, 'I am going to give this to you. The number of beads here represents the time you will be reborn in the Pure Land'.

As Madam counted them, she got fifty-three. When she woke up, she tried to remember the number.

In the following year, on the thirteenth day of the fifth month, she suddenly

told her family, ‘I am going to the west today. You all may chant the name of the Buddha for my benefit on my westward journey’.

Her sons and daughters-in-law surrounded her couch and chanted the name of the Buddha in unison. Madam Li turned her face to the west, sat in an upright position, and passed away. Daolong recounted the event to exhort people in the world.

Biography 123 Madam Xu 徐氏⁴²

Madam Xu, a native of Yuyao, was the wife of Hu Zhenyue 胡振嶽. She lost her husband in her forties, and since then she entrusted all domestic affairs to her sons. Every morning after she washed up, she would go to a quiet chamber to worship Amitābha Buddha and chant his name a thousand times. This routine went on for over twenty years.

One day, she suddenly told her family, ‘The Golden Lad and the Jade Maiden are descending from above with canopies and streamers to escort me. I’ll be leaving in three days.’

Three days later, in the evening she called her family together and bade them farewell. She did not say much other than urging them to chant the name of Amitābha Buddha. Afterwards, she sat in an upright position and passed away.

Appendix II: two samples of Chan women's biographies

Biography 16 The Wandering Old Woman Li 李行婆

⁴³

Regarding the Wandering Old Woman Li, no one knew about her provenance. She used to seek instructions from Chan Master Kuang of Tanzhou 潭州曠禪師 (740–830). The Master asked her, ‘Do you remember what happened in Jiangzhou?’

‘I would not follow anyone but the Master,’ said the old woman.

‘There are more lies than truth in what you said.’

‘What did I hide from you?’

‘I pity you being a woman,’ said the Master, ‘so I let go of my cane.’

‘I have never met a respectable master,’ said the old woman.

‘What's my fault?’ said the Master.

‘Since you, Master, are not at fault,’ said the old woman, ‘are you saying that I am at fault?’

‘What would a faultless person do?’ said the Master.

‘How come you always turn things upside down?’ said the old woman, as she was raising her fists.

‘I really did not hide anything from you,’ said the Master.

Biography 21 The Old Woman Who Burned A Lodge 燒庵婆⁴⁴

Regarding the Old Woman Who Burned a Lodge, no one knew about her provenance. She had been giving offerings to the abbot whom she hosted in a lodge for about twenty years, during which time she asked a maid to send him food regularly.

One day, she asked her maid to approach the abbot, give him a pinch, and say, ‘Right at this moment, what do you do?’

‘A withered tree is leaning against a cold cliff,’ said the monk, ‘for three winters it has had no warmth in it.’

When the maid reported to the old woman, the old woman said, ‘For the past twenty years, I’ve been giving my offerings to a vulgar man.’ Thereupon she kicked the monk out and burned the lodge.

Notes

- 1 Although the Biography of Empress Xu 徐皇后傳 (82) in the *Shannüiren zhuan* was based partially on her biography in the official history of the Ming dynasty (*Mingshi* 明史), the information about her Buddhist life did not come from that source.
- 2 Indeed, Peng did write many of these biographies in the sense that when taking some of the biographical accounts from their original sources, Peng had to rewrite them somewhat so that they could be read as self-contained narratives in his collection. The writing of the Biography of Empress Xu is a good case in point. Peng, in fact, edited another volume called *Jushi zhuan* 居士傳 (Biographies of Buddhist Laymen), which includes only male Buddhist practitioners. See *Daizō shinzen Zokuzōkyō* 大藏新纂續藏經 88 vols (repr., Taipei: Baima jingshe yinjing hui, n.d.), work no. 1646, vol. 88, pp. 180–291 (hereafter ZZ1646[88].180–291). While a detailed analysis of the *Jushi zhuan* will certainly yield important insights on Peng's gender perspective on Buddhist religiosity, my preliminary study shows that Pure Land devotion was privileged in the anthology as it was in the *Shannüiren zhuan*. Similarly, Pure Land devotion and Chan practice were deemed compatible though the latter was given little attention in the *Jushi zhuan*. In fact, only one biography (that of Layman Pang of the Tang

dynasty) was reserved for Chan Buddhists in the anthology. Notably, Layman Pang's biography was not written in the same laconic style characteristic of those of the Chan women's biographies in the *Shannüren zhuan*. Moreover, though not rich in biographical specifics, Pang's biography includes some essential details about his wife and two children who were also Chan Buddhists and concludes with his own death. This seems to be a critical difference between the two anthologies and deserves more thorough examination. Further, the narrative structure of the biographies in the *Jushi zhuan* is borrowed from the Confucian dynastic historiography and they speak a consistent voice of Buddho-Confucian syncretism. This is evidently different from the disjunctive voices embedded in the biographies of Pure Land women and Chan women in the *Shannüren zhuan*. Unlike the biographies of Buddhist laywomen which try to make the female subjects fit closely into certain prescribed models of female Confucian propriety, even as they serve as models of Pure Land piety, the biographies of Buddhist laymen aim at presenting the characteristic Buddhist practices of the male subjects without much ulterior motive.

- 3 It is important to note that the attention and narrative space given to the Chan men in the *Jushi zhuan* is limited. It appears that by including fourteen Chan women's biographies in the *Shannüren zhuan*, Peng Jiqing wanted to emphasise women's ability to pursue Buddhist transcendence and deliverance, even if he had to struggle to negotiate with his narrative presentations of two differing models of Buddhist womanhood. This seems particularly obvious as other similar collections from late imperial times of accounts of Pure Land devotees who attain rebirth do not include Chan examples.
- 4 Richard Shek, 'Testimony to the Resilience of the Mind: The Life and Thought of P'eng Shao-sheng (1740–1796)', in Richard J. Smith and D. W. Y. Kwok (eds), *Cosmology, Ontology, and Human Efficacy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp. 91–2.
- 5 Peng Jiqing, *Yixing ju ji* – 行居集 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1973), *juan* 1, pp. 1b–2a (hereafter, 1:1b–2a.).
- 6 See Peng Jiqing's comments at the end of *juan* 1 of the *Jushi zhuan*, ZZ1646[88].187a1–4.
- 7 This biographical sketch of Peng intends to offer the basic contours of his intellectual and religious life, with a focus on his Buddho-Confucian syncretism that has a direct bearing on the editing of the *Biographies of Good Women*. For more details of his life, see Arthur Hummel (ed.), *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1943), pp. 614–16; Shek, 'Testimony to the Resilience of

- the Mind', pp. 82–90; Colin Jeffcott, 'Peng Shaosheng or Peng Jiqing?: Biographies of a Confucian Buddhist', in Benjamin Penny (ed.), *Biography and Religion in China and Tibet* (London: Curzon Press, 2002), pp. 148–77.
- 8 Araki Kengo, 'Confucianism and Buddhism in the Late Ming', in William Theodore de Bary and the Conference on Seventeenth-Century Chinese Thought, *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 39–66.
 - 9 Cited in Araki, 'Confucianism and Buddhism in the Late Ming', p. 50.
 - 10 Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 3.
 - 11 Liu Shu 劉淑 in Biography 117 (ZZ1657[88].416b10–24) is an excellent example of nonconformists-turned-Buddhists.
 - 12 Gui Zhuang 歸莊 (1613–1673), 'Yu Boan Chanshi' 與樂庵禪師 (A Letter to Chan Master Boan), in *Gui Zhuang ji* 歸莊集 (Literary Works of Gui Zhuang) 2 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), vol. 2, p. 335.
 - 13 Cited in Cai Hongsheng 蔡鴻生, *Nigu tan* 尼姑譚 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue, 1996), p. 325. The reason for the ban, of course, must have been complex, but the perception that nuns and monks were polluting public morale seems to be prevalent at least in the Zhejiang and Jiangnan areas, whence the good women in the *Shannüren zhuan* were drawn. See Lan Tingyuan 藍鼎元 (1680–1733), 'Yu youren lun Zhe ni shu' 與友人論浙尼書 (Letter to a Friend to Discuss the Nuns in Zhejiang), cited in Cai Hongsheng, *Nigu tan*, pp. 339–40. See also Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, tr. Zheng Pengnian 鄭彭年, *Jianming Zhongguo fojiao shi* 簡明中國佛教史 (A Brief History of Chinese Buddhism) (Shanghai: Shanghai yiwen, 1986), p. 293.
 - 14 Peng circulated his own Buddhist writings at least to his relatives. For instance, his niece, Tao Shan 陶善, who was the subject of the last biography in the *Shannüren zhuan*, was said to have read and been inspired by Peng's *Biographies of Buddhist Laymen* and eventually took a vow for rebirth in the Pure Land. See her biographical account (亡妻陶孺人事略) by her husband Peng Xiluo 彭希洛 (Peng Jiqing's nephew) in ZZ1213[62].841b12–13. For an excellent study of Tao Shan, see Beata Grant, 'Who is this I? Who is that Other? The Poetry of an Eighteenth Century Buddhist Laywoman', *Late Imperial China* 15/1 (1994), pp. 1–40. How popular the *Shannüren zhuan* was during the Qing dynasty is hard to determine. However, judging from the fact that the majority of the Pure Land women and that includes practically all good women from the Qing dynasty in the anthology, came from the Jiangnan region to which Peng

Jiqing's native place belonged, it seems reasonable to believe that the anthology was circulated in the Jiangnan region, to say the least.

15 ZZ1657[88].399c2.

16 See Peng Jiqing's biography in Hu Ting's 胡庭 *Jingtu shengxian lu* 淨土聖賢錄續編, in ZZ1550[78].330c24–331a1. So popular was the collection that in the late nineteenth century when Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), a Pure Land lay Buddhist, founded the renowned Jinling kejingchu 金陵刻經處 (Jinling Bureau of Sūtra Publication), it was one of the texts that went to print under Yang's supervision.

17 Wang Jin 汪縉 (1725–1792), one of Peng Jiqing's best friends who was also a Buddhist, had commented on Peng's theory of 'seeking the strayed mind' in his remarks on the 'Biography of Prince Jingling (460–494)', in the *Jushi zhuan*. See Peng Jiqing, *Jushi zhuan* (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling guji keyinshu, 1991), pp. 86–91.

18 Peng Jiqing, *Yixing ju ji*, 4:4a.

19 Peng, *Yixing ju ji*, 1:22b–23a, 2:19b.

20 Peng, *Yixing ju ji*, 1:4a.

21 Peng, *Yixing ju ji*, 4:1a.

22 Peng, *Yixing ju ji*, 4:4a.

23 While the *Shiji* may be predisposed to explore moral issues through its narratives of concrete historical figures, Sima Qian was by no means a moralist. See Stephen Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), esp. pp. 123–44.

24 See D. C. Twitchett, 'Chinese Biographical Writing', in W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank (eds), *Historians of China and Japan* (1961; 4th impression, London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 102.

25 Twitchett, 'Chinese Biographical Writing', pp. 107–9.

26 Of the twenty-five official dynastic histories, thirteen contain a collective biography of moral women under the title of 'Lienü zhuan'. For the influence of Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan* on the writing of the 'Biographies of Women' chapters in early dynastic histories, see Sherry J. Mou, *Gentlemen's Prescriptions for Women's Lives: A Thousand Years of Biographies of Chinese Women* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2004).

27 Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al. (comp.), *Jinshu*, 10 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua,

- 28 For a recent study of the *Lienü zhuan*, see Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998).
- 29 See e.g., Biography 67 (The Wife of Jiang the Eighteenth), ZZ1657[88].408c17–24. Citations of the biographical subject's poetry writing seem to be also common in the biographies of Buddhist women other than the Pure Land School. One notable example is Biography 1 (ZZ1657[88].401a14–b4). In the original context of the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks), both the poems of Sengdu 僧度, Yang Tiaohua's 楊苕華 fiancé, and Yang herself were quoted in full, but in Yang's 'biography' Sengdu's poems were edited out, whereas Yang's poems were retained to demonstrate her 'blind faith' in traditional Confucian values prior to her conversion to Buddhism. So, although her poems did not prove her early faith in Buddhism, they were apparently kept to reveal her personal character as well as her later decisive determination to become a Buddhist. In the case of a Chan woman, her writing, primarily in the form of Buddhist verses, would be quoted in full so that the biography would take on a more personal character.
- 30 Biography 57 (Madam Tao 陶氏) (ZZ1657[88].408a14–18) and Biography 73 (Madam Zhou 周氏) (ZZ1657[88].409a21–b11) are the only exceptions in the Pure Land women's biographies in Peng's collection that do not mention the death of the biographical subject.
- 31 John R. McRae, 'Encounter Dialogues and the Transformation of the Spiritual Path in Chinese Ch'an', in Robert E. Buswell, Jr, and Robert Gimello (eds.) *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), pp. 354, 355.
- 32 McRae, 'Encounter Dialogues', p. 339.
- 33 For a good discussion of the issues of gender equality in Chan Buddhism, see Miriam L. Levering, 'Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism', in José Ignacio Cabezón, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), pp. 137–56.
- 34 See Jiexian 戒顯, *Xianguo suilu*, ZZ1642[88].47a10–11.
- 35 See Zhou Kefu's 周克復 (1656–1739) *Jingtu quanshu* 淨土全書 (Compendium on the Pure Land), ZZ1176[62].183a1.
- 36 Peng once said, 'Students of Mahayana can ill afford not to cultivate the Pure Land'. See Peng, *Yixing ju ji*, 1:23b. See also 1:24b where he said

Huineng 慧能 (d.713), the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, was wrong in censuring the Pure Land doctrine. A notable example where the subject's interest in Chan was edited out can be found in Biography 117 (Liu Shu, as mentioned in note 11) in the *Shannüren zhuan*.

37 ZZ1657[88].418b9–10.

38 See Tong Wen 通問 (ed.) and Shi Pei 施沛 (comp.), *Xudeng cungao 續燈存稿*, in ZZ1585[84].739a4. In the biography of Zhao Dazhou 趙大洲 (1508–1576) in the *Jushi zhuan*, Peng Jiqing made a special note that he considered Zhao to be one of the most heroic of all men. It seems clear, then, that Nun Sankong's 'manly ambitions' (*zhangfu zhi xiong* 丈夫之雄) would be out of place and out of character in a good woman's biography, as far as Peng Jiqing is concerned. For a discussion of the notion of *zhangfu*, see Levering, 'Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism', pp. 142–3 and Beata Grant, *Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), pp. viii, 25–26, 29, 32–33, 35, 47.

39 See ZZ1657[88].406a22–23.

40 See ZZ1657[88].403c22–23. The same motif appears in Biographies 3, 109, 123 and 139.

41 ZZ1657[88].416a9–18.

42 ZZ1657[88].417c16–419a1.

43 ZZ1657[88].403b9–14.

44 ZZ1657[88].403c24–404a3.

'All of Their Customs are Daughters of Their Religion': Baptists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s–present

Kathleen M. McIntyre

Aren't we ready as Christian women to contribute, even if we are sacrificing, to help our brothers and sisters who are subjugated by idolatry and ignorance? Many Catholic societies are increasingly publishing false propaganda against us. Why don't we make an effort, Christian women, so that the truth may triumph?¹

Mexican Esther G. de Montes expressed these sentiments in her January 1922 *Unión Nacional Femenil Bautista* (UNFB/National Baptist Women's Union) newsletter as a means to solicit funds for the construction of a Baptist church in southern Mexico. Her predominantly *mestizo* congregation, the *Convención Nacional Bautista de México* (CNBM/National Baptist Convention of Mexico) was particularly interested in working with indigenous communities after the Mexican Revolution's conclusion in 1920.² The *Unión Femenil* supported a missionary project in a Zapotec community of Oaxaca throughout the 1920s.

While Protestant missionary work had proliferated in northern Mexico after President Benito Juárez's Reform Laws (1857–60), many indigenous regions remained fertile sites for missionaries in the post-revolutionary 1920s. With sixteen distinct ethnic groupings constituting the overwhelming majority of the state's population, Oaxaca was an especially important evangelisation zone. Remarkably, the state is currently home to 23 per cent of the nation's total indigenous population.³ Missionaries accustomed to working in *mestizo* Mexico noted an ethnic and cultural divide as they ventured south.⁴ Late nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries saw themselves as introducing a true Christianity, uncorrupted by Roman Catholicism, to indigenous Mexicans for the first time.⁵ In his 1893 report for the Methodist Mission Society, Ohioan Lucius C. Smith observed:

But really the religion of the Indians of this state is a crude mixture of the semi pagan superstitions of Rome and the wholly pagan superstitions of their ancestors of pre-Spanish times, and it is difficult to tell which predominates...What we have said seems to us sufficient to prove that the Indians of Oaxaca are generally in bondage to Satan, and need the labors of the Christian missionary as much as any people on the face of the

Such nineteenth-century Protestant criticisms were also familiar tropes for the twentieth-century Baptist missionaries in Oaxaca who bemoaned native peoples' syncretic religious rituals. The *Unión Femenil* was determined to establish an appropriate space where Zapotecs could learn the 'true' and 'dignified' meaning of Christianity.⁷

As in other missionary regions, Protestant women made up a large proportion of volunteers and permanent staff dedicated to evangelising native communities.⁸ Though lacking formal electoral rights, Protestant Mexican women could concomitantly support the goals of the revolutionary state and curb the influence of the Roman Catholic Church by funding churches in indigenous communities. Founded in 1919, the *Unión Nacional Femenil Bautista* had over twenty-five chapters, mostly in northern and central Mexico. The *Unión Femenil* perceived Catholicism in Oaxaca, 'that far off region of our Republic', as a central obstacle to modernisation and progress for post-revolutionary Mexico.⁹ Their efforts to support the Baptist church's first mission project in southern Mexico put them in close contact with Zapotec missionary Samuel Juárez García, whom Catholics later murdered in 1935. Consequently, Zapotec followers designated Juárez García the first indigenous Baptist martyr in Mexico.

My analysis of this contentious Baptist project in the Central Valley of Oaxaca reveals the intersection of missionary and revolutionary agendas with contrasting conceptualisations of gender, ethnic and regional identities. Although members of the *Unión Femenil* felt a Christian obligation to support indigenous converts, they saw Zapotec culture as a frustrating obstacle in attaining a dual (and at times competing) Mexican/Christian identity. Local conflicts in the Central Valley community of San Jerónimo Tlacoahuaya led to alternate martyrdom narratives that speak to the larger religious conflicts in indigenous Mexico but prioritise Protestant, not the dominant Catholic, histories of martyrdom.¹⁰ By examining an oral history of martyrdom, I trace a community's *construction* as well as its *contestation* of collective memory.¹¹ Primarily a local history of one Baptist congregation, this article details these events and experiences as representative of a larger pattern of religious conflict in Oaxaca. However, what makes this study of Tlacoahuaya particularly important is that it provides an intimate look at the interworking of a new belief system in a centuries-old village that the predominantly *mestizo* Baptist men and women did not understand in the post-revolutionary period.

Scholarship

With this study, I seek to contribute to the slim corpus of scholarship on Protestantism in rural Mexico while using conflict as a lens into gender, ethnic

and national identities. Few scholarly studies on Protestant growth have focused on Oaxaca.¹² Although recent autobiographies and anthropological research have lightly touched on issues of gender in the process of faith conversion and career advancement in Mexico, comprehensive studies dedicated to Protestant women in Mexico have yet to be pursued.¹³ For Oaxaca, most recent research on gender concentrates on the *fiesta* system and its impact on incidents of domestic violence in rural communities, on women's advanced economic position in artisan communities due to male migration to the United States or on Catholic women's participation in the waning liberation theology strain of the Oaxacan archdiocese.¹⁴ Studies on rural indigenous Oaxacan women offer little acknowledgement of the growth of Protestantism throughout southern Mexico. Nicole Sault's 2001 analysis of the impact of Protestant conversion on the *compradazgo* system for Zapotec women represents an important beginning to scholarship on Protestantism and gender in indigenous Mexico.¹⁵ This article attempts to synthesise the intersection of post-revolutionary religious conflicts and shifting conceptualisations of gender, ethnic and national identities.

Gender historians of post-revolutionary Mexico have richly portrayed how women organised themselves in relation to the state. Though women did not obtain official suffrage or the right to run for national offices until 1953, these limitations had 'little bearing on the contingent, inhabited, and gendered ways women practiced revolutionary citizenship'.¹⁶ Most early women's activism was connected to religious institutions and the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP/Ministry of Education).¹⁷ For example, historian Kristina Boylan, focusing on anti-clericalism in the central western state of Jalisco, demonstrates how women of Catholic Action effectively protested against state mandated restrictions on Catholicism by organising boycotts and shouting '¡Viva Cristo Rey!' in public, thereby defying laws created to relegate worship to the domestic sphere.¹⁸ In contrast to the Catholic Action women who opposed government legislation on religious practices, historian Marjorie Becker depicts how poor rural women in Michoacán exhibited their new revolutionary state identity by dancing on the charred ashes of a once-cherished image of the Virgin Mary.¹⁹ In the arena of education, Mary Kay Vaughan analyses how freshly certified female public school teachers helped the state government incorporate indigenous children into the fabric of the *mestizo* nation by introducing the Spanish language in monolingual communities and promoting cultural nationalism.²⁰ Finally, Deborah Baldwin traces the important connection between Protestantism in northern Mexico and the development of revolutionary ideologies in that region. Baldwin acknowledges the sustained presence of Protestant women as teachers and staff, but she offers little analysis of gender relations in missionary organisations.²¹ Thus, while the historiography on Mexican women's role in post-revolutionary educational systems, anti-clericalism and agrarianism is deep, emphasis on the role of Protestant women in post-revolutionary Mexico

remains rather sparse.²² How did Protestant women negotiate revolutionary citizenship? And what is the legacy of women-initiated missionary projects? How is the *mestizo/indígena* relationship also a gendered one for Protestants?

Protestant inroads in Oaxaca

Bolstered by liberal President Benito Juárez's 1857 formal separation of church and state, North American Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries established small private schools and bible study classes along the Mexican border in the late nineteenth century.²³ In addition to welcoming Protestants as competition for the Catholic Church, Juárez expected newly arrived missionaries to teach indigenous populations, 'to read rather than light candles'.²⁴ Melinda Rankin was the first permanent US missionary in Mexico. Writing in 1875 about her success in the northern state of Monterey, Rankin argued that her gender made her less of a threat to Mexican Catholic clergy. 'The priests, no doubt, watched with jealous eye this singular invasion of their sacred territory; yet what could they do, a *woman* was at the bottom of the mischief, and how could they lay violent hands on *her*!'²⁵ Rankin challenged North American missionaries to 'stand ready with your Bibles' since 'Christ is bidding us take that land for Him'.²⁶ Rankin further encouraged young Protestants to 'take up the fallen banner of the lamented Stephen' and bring the Gospel to indigenous communities.²⁷ Rankin reminded her readers that, 'Martyrdom oftentimes bears precious fruit', affirming that the Christian Church only grew stronger with each wave of persecution.²⁸ While Protestant missionaries like Rankin in the late nineteenth century spoke of their duties to conquer Mexico spiritually, post-revolutionary North American missionaries took a more cautious approach. Aware of the strength of Mexican nationalism in the post-revolutionary period, Mission leaders particularly hoped for Mexican men and women, not North Americans, to be the face of evangelisation.²⁹

Agrarianism, nationalism and anti-clericalism were at the heart of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. The document laid out the nation's bold new relationship with the Catholic Church, *hacendados* (large land holders) and foreign companies.³⁰ The revolutionary government sought to unite Mexico through an emphasis on civic education and allegiance to the state, not to the Roman Catholic Church. Such radical post-revolutionary legislation gave missionaries the opening which they had long awaited. As was the trend at the Federal level, the Oaxacan state government welcomed Protestant organisations as a means of modernising and incorporating Oaxaca's sixteen distinct indigenous groupings. Prayer candles, a home altar with images of saints and the Virgin of Guadalupe, and alcohol were all components of folk Catholicism that distressed Protestant missionaries.³¹ The *Convención Nacional Bautista de México* entered Oaxaca in 1920 with the fierce determination to bring Christianity and the tenets of the Mexican Revolution

to indigenous southern Mexico.³²

Convención Bautista Nacional de México in Tlacoahuaya

During autumn 1920, the CNBM convened in Torreón, Coahuila to discuss the potential fruitfulness of Baptist evangelisation in indigenous Mexico. 'What can we do to evangelise the Indians?' was the principal theme of the national meeting, where the CNBM developed a comprehensive plan for the Baptist Church's penetration into Mexico's interior.³³ To that end, Samuel Juárez García convinced the Convention that his native San Jerónimo Tlacoahuaya, a town of about 2,000 mostly monolingual Zapotec residents located twenty-one kilometres east of the capital, was a logical centre for evangelisation that would soon stretch across Oaxaca.

In early correspondence with the Baptist Convention, Juárez García described his Zapotec village in the tone of a superior outsider. After all, he had a northern education, was a fluent Spanish-speaker and was Protestant. But he also identified as an intimate member. He closed his letters warmly as 'the missionary among the Zapotecs'. He frequently dedicated full columns of his newsletter extolling pre-Hispanic Zapotec architectural achievements such as Monte Alban and Mitla.³⁴ Juárez García's vacillation between paternalism towards and pride in Tlacoahuayans speaks to national but also regional interpretations of *indigenismo* and especially *Oaxaqueñismo* – celebration of Oaxaca's indigenous archeological sites, regional cuisines and colourful dress and dance.³⁵ While the Mexican government sought to modernise and assimilate indigenous communities, 'the Indian was [still] lauded as the vessel of important and often sophisticated folk traditions'.³⁶ But when it came to religion, Juárez García concluded that it was the Evangelical's duty

to awaken this race, which for centuries has been stuck in a deep lethargy. Thank God that the New Testament has begun to illuminate this dark region where Satan and Romanism has prevailed. The religion of the Zapotecs is the one that the conquerors brought: the Catholic religion with all of its gross idolatry.³⁷

Juárez García argued that the Catholic Church's hegemonic hold on his community was responsible for the serious challenges he faced.

Juárez García repeatedly asserted that Zapotec cultural identity coupled with Catholicism made his neighbours painstakingly difficult to convert. He wrote in a 1921 missionary report: 'It is not easy to convert Indians. Their ideas are so deeply ingrained that despite Reason and Scripture they offer no argument other than this is the custom of our people'.³⁸ For Juárez García, as for many Protestant missionaries and national political leaders during the Cristiada period and the nascent stage of *indigenismo*, Roman Catholicism was a

dangerous religion for indigenous Mexico.³⁹ Despite being a native Zapotec, Juárez García disparaged many 'traditional' Zapotec customs and Catholicism, arguing that these customs were actually vestiges of European colonialism. In his correspondence, he criticised Zapotec syncretic rituals that he believed misrepresented the tenets of Christianity. Reverence for, and worship of, the mountains, local rivers and streams and the cornfield plays an important role in indigenous spiritual life. If indigenous Mexicans could jettison their folk Catholicism, Juárez García argued, only then would they become truly free Mexicans.

In particular, the Zapotec missionary condemned the patron saint's day fiesta customs in most indigenous communities. He viewed it as a money drain, an excuse to get drunk and a misrepresentation of Christianity. Juárez García singled out *mescal* as a significant obstacle to conversion in a Baptist newsletter in 1921:

There is not a single party where numerous bottles of mescal don't appear. If it's a Catholic holiday, the mescal is the stimulant for religiosity, and if it's a patriotic holiday, it's the stimulant for patriotism. Mescal appears everywhere. There are some individuals who go on binges for two weeks straight or even whole months. And it's not just the men who practice this vice, but also the women.⁴⁰

By noting that Zapotec women also drank, Juárez García sought to convey to his readers that alcoholism was not just a moral or public health concern but also a women's issue: if women were engaging in such appalling behaviour who would care for the home and children?

By late autumn 1921, Juárez García listed approximately fifty converts who attended Bible study in his crowded home. Ensured of his base, Juárez García's next step was to establish a permanent chapel for his members. A project taken up by northern *mestiza* Baptist women, a new Baptist chapel represented an opportunity to reinforce the Convención's network in southern indigenous Mexico.

La Unión Femenil and the new chapel

The *Unión Femenil* leadership body envisioned indigenous Mexicans as vulnerable victims of Roman Catholic traditions. Principal fundraiser Esther G. de Montes frequently reminded her readers of their duties as Christian women to rescue the Zapotecs even though she had never been to Oaxaca. She described witnessing in other parts of Mexico indigenous women and children exhaustedly dancing the traditional *son de tamboriles* for hours in honour of pre-Hispanic deities who they fused with Catholic saints: 'Oh, how the heart saddens when it sees our indigenous class so full of absolute fanaticism'.⁴¹ In her subsequent fundraising columns, de Montes described Zapotecs as

unfortunate souls in need of guidance from their 'wiser' (*mestiza*) sisters. De Montes challenged her readers:

Doesn't it seem to you sisters that the time has come, that we stop this fanaticism and help our brothers and sisters who have been misled for so many years? How sad is the life of a woman who does not have the hope and love of our sweet Jesus! Let us consider for a moment what Christ is for us, Christian women. How he has dignified woman and her work, how he has been her collaborator...How many sisters will take advantage of this opportunity, remembering the words of our blessed Teacher who said [Matthew 25: 40] – 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'?⁴²

The *Unión Femenil* viewed Mexico's indigenous population as trapped in Catholic fanaticism and idolatry from the conquest period.

De Montes's pleas for contributions were successful. Early into her campaign, she notified her members that they could pay for the total estimated cost of five hundred dollars.⁴³ National Baptist Convention President Donato Ramírez Ruiz praised the *Unión Femenil* for their 'heroic fundraising labours that would eventually lead to literacy and introduction of the Gospel to the five million indigenous Mexicans who were monolingual.'⁴⁴

Throughout the process of building the chapel, the *Unión Femenil* leadership expressed irritation over the slow pace of work and threatened to freeze funds until Juárez García and his Oaxacan staff could give evidence of progress. In November 1925, *Unión Femenil* President Amada T. de García informed her readers 'with much embarrassment' that the chapel was still not ready, due to what Juárez García claimed were frequent rains and not having enough funds in hand.⁴⁵ Clearly she did not believe these excuses. A year earlier, de García had written an exasperated letter to *CNBM* president Andrés R. Cavazos asking why the Oaxacan missionary did not consider the potential delays during the rainy season beforehand and why he did not find a different contractor. Cavazos and national missionary director Ernesto Uriegas travelled to Tlacoahuaya to oversee the last stage of construction. Juárez García explained to the northern *mestizo* men that according to the traditional *cargo* system, a civil-religious hierarchy in indigenous communities of Oaxaca, the contractor had been obligated by the community to fulfil a municipal position, and hence there was a delay. Cavazos and Uriegas knew little about *usos y costumbres* (local customary law) and saw it as an obstacle to efficiency and progress.⁴⁶ *Mestizo* frustration with indigenous customs and lack of progress is evident in their insinuations that the building of the Zapotec chapel would have dragged on for years if it had not been for their supervision. The debate over whether Protestantism jeopardises the functioning of *tequio* and *cargo* – two essential components of *usos y costumbres* – remains a contentious issue in Oaxacan communities today.⁴⁷

After substantial delays, the chapel finally opened on 30 May 1926, and its photograph graced the cover of *El Atalaya Bautista* (Figure 1).⁴⁸ The total cost of the chapel was \$2,300 (4.6 times the original budget), which the *Unión Femenil* of Mexico had raised in full. When explaining the construction delays and the difficulty in adhering to the original budget, Juárez García informed the *Unión Femenil* and *Convención* missionary board that from the master bricklayer down to the last labourer, everyone involved in the construction of the Church was of Zapotec ethnicity.⁴⁹ ‘We acknowledge our ignorance because, well, we’re not engineers’, a response that seemed to affirm the minister’s exaltation of past Zapotec architectural achievements but scant confidence in contemporary culture.⁵⁰ He also reported that Catholics unsuccessfully tried to burn down the door of the chapel the night before the dedication.⁵¹



Figure 1: *El Atalaya Bautista*'s 1926 cover story on the Tlacoahuaya Church's inauguration.

Meanwhile, the *Unión Femenil* sent a delegation down to Oaxaca to attend the church dedication. Member and sometime Treasurer, Raquel A. Delgado described the success of the inauguration: 'Despite all of the intrigues of the devil to obstruct the dedication ceremony, the church has enjoyed larger than usual attendance, and it was filled up entirely the day we dedicated it to the TRUE God. It is a beautiful building, as you can see, and represents with dignity the Baptist cause in that far off region of our Republic'.⁵² Yet while

the *Unión Femenil* members were pleased with the completion of the chapel, they soon articulated serious concerns about Zapotec religious practices.

Based on *La Unión Femenil's* trip to Tlacoahuaya for the May inauguration, their editorial page in *El Atalyaya Bautista* on 17 June 1926 featured an article entitled 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas'. The ethnographic-style piece was overflowing with criticism of women's subordination in folk Catholicism, the fiesta system and traditional healing methods. Treasurer Delgado described Zapotecs as 'a very strong and clean race but their ignorance has brought them to ruins. All of their customs are daughters of their religion; from that religion that, mixed with the primitive adoration of idols, has come to form a disgusting cult'.⁵³ The Baptist women hoped to eradicate what they deemed vestiges of paganism – the syncretic fusion of saints with native deities and pre-Hispanic rituals that they believed fuelled expensive, mescal-driven fiestas.

The account went on to describe the condition of the Zapotec woman as 'sadder than you can imagine', citing illiteracy and unbalanced gender roles in marriage and civic life, where a woman lives in a 'virtual state of slavery, subject to all of the desires of the man practically treating her like a cargo animal; she has no rights to anything'.⁵⁴ In particular, the account lamented how Zapotec women sat on the ground during civic ceremonies while men sat on benches and that men rode mules while women walked barefoot behind.⁵⁵ Although Mexican women could not vote, the Baptist women interpreted their role as Revolutionary Mexican citizens as bring to integrate indigenous peoples into the fabric of the nation. Part of this assimilation meant learning Spanish, abstaining from alcohol, breaking from the grips of Catholicism and especially ending their dependency on *curanderas*, or healers.⁵⁶ *Unión Femenil* members instructed Oaxacan women to be 'dignified' Christian women, emulating the middle-class *mestiza* Baptist women.

Like many Protestant missionary organisations, the *Unión Femenil* representatives disapproved of traditional healing methods and favoured western-style clinics to operate in indigenous communities.⁵⁷ The representatives were particularly horrified by the Zapotec practice of searching for a child's *alma* (soul) if she became ill, the 'peculiar' practice of feeding a hardboiled egg to an infant stricken by *mal de ojo* (evil eye) and preserving umbilical cords after birth.⁵⁸ The *Unión Femenil's* newsletter described the practice:

When a child gets sick and naturally is weak and sad, they say: the soul has already left the child, and then they start thinking and investigating about how the soul might have gotten kicked out by a bang or maybe frightened away by a startle. Once they have found the site, they clear it out and clean it, decorating it with flowers and put in the center of it a pot with water and flowers. Once all of this has been arranged, they bring the child there and

sing to him until he falls asleep in the arms of his mother. Later they lay the child down on the ground, placing the pot with water and the flowers near the child's head. A new pitcher, this one is broken on top of a large rock prepared for the effect, producing a strong noise that makes the child wake up, very frightened. Then the mother in a loud voice in Zapotec says: 'Let's go, let's go child, to the house', and saying this, she hits the ground with the palm of her right hand and, taking the child by his feet, hangs him over the pot that has the water and flowers. After this strange ceremony, she takes the child in her arms and gives him a boiled egg to eat without letting a piece of egg fall.⁵⁹

The newsletter concluded that Zapotec mothers 'almost always prefer their remedies or visit witches or healers, than accept the services of a doctor'.⁶⁰ In other words, the northern Mexican Baptist women, like the nascent Mexican government's health outreach programmes, did not trust traditional health remedies in Zapotec communities. The closing line of the article perhaps best exemplifies the *Unión Femenil's* aspirations for indigenous Mexico: 'We wish that Christ blesses work with the Indians, so that, illuminated by the Gospel, the Indians can raise themselves up, dignified by better luck, free of the fanaticism and ignorance that drowns them in misery'.⁶¹ Like their male counterparts, the *Unión Femenil* viewed the residents of Tlacoahuaya as dual victims of Catholicism and their indigenous heritage. For the *mestiza* women, indigenous Mexicans needed their spiritual and educational guidance to progress and be 'dignified.' Revitalising or preserving their present culture(s) was not an option.

The *mestizo/indígena* binary was not only a geographic *northern/southern* one but also a gendered one: *mestizos* played the dominant, sanctioned male role and indigenous peoples played the subordinate, unsanctioned female role. *Mestiza* women from northern and central Mexico viewed indigenous Mexico as weak and childish much like the original Spanish colonisers saw indigenous peoples. Spanish colonisers viewed native religion and traditions as weak, feminine and sacrilegious and the Catholic religion as the powerful, masculine and sacred opposite.⁶² In the case of the construction of the Tlacoahuaya Baptist chapel, it was the northern *mestizo* men, A. R. Cavazos and Ernesto Urigas, who assured CNBM members that they had intervened and made sure the construction work was carried out efficiently.

In the months following the dedication ceremony in Oaxaca, the CNBM reflected over how unrealistic the Convention's original timeline was for evangelical conversion in Oaxaca. Missionary President Moisés Arévalo concluded in October 1926: 'The general perspective of the work in the Zapotec region is good. But it demands patience and steadiness so that it may work actively, although the results achieved will be very slow. But remember it is promised in the Holy Word that these works of the faithful are not done in vain'.⁶³ The northern Baptists, who were mostly *mestizos* visiting 'Indian

country' for the first time, underestimated the strongly woven cultural norms and social organisation in Oaxacan communities.



Figure 2: Remains of the original Baptist Church of Tlacochahuaya, Spring 2010. Photograph: © the author.

Protestantism and violence

While religious conflicts during the 1920s in Oaxaca paled in comparison to the Cristero violence in central Mexico, the 1930s were particularly volatile in Oaxaca.⁶⁴ Religious and political differences between Protestants and Catholics sometimes led to violent interactions in their competition for indigenous peoples' souls. The Catholic archdiocese was concerned with the growth of Protestantism in Oaxaca. Protestants in Tlacochahuaya participated in the burning of images of saints and demanded an audit of the Catholic Church's inventory. On 19 September 1923, Archbishop Núñez y Zárte visited Tlacochahuaya and declared: 'Despite the farcical attempts by the Protestants to convert the town, they've failed to do so, because the residents still strongly practice the faith bestowed upon them by their elders'.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the archdiocese's monthly *Revista Oficial* warned its readers to be cautious of the *amistoso* (friendly) Protestant missionaries, especially since their churches could have links to socialist schools in Oaxaca. Archbishop Núñez y Zárte closed his pastoral letter by warning Catholic parents not to let their children accept gifts such as Bibles, pencils or candies from Protestant missionaries.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, a series of violent conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in Oaxaca impeded Baptist growth just after the Tlacochahuayan chapel was completed.⁶⁷ The Protestants identified themselves as *agraristas*, supporters of President Lázaro Cárdenas's (1934–40) bold land distribution programme, while Catholics opposed such legislation and argued that it resembled socialism. This conflict is readily apparent in Tlacochahuaya. For example, in late 1934, Damien Ángeles, leader of the town's Catholic Association, was shot six times in the back as he worked in his garlic field.⁶⁸ With assistance from Acción Católica (Catholic Action, a lay advocacy group) in Oaxaca City, Catholics in Tlacochahuaya wrote letters to the district court and to the state and federal government demanding an investigation of Ángeles's murder.⁶⁹ The Protestant assailants were not charged despite the Catholic pressure. For Catholic Tlacochahuayans, Ángeles's murder was their rallying call for justice.⁷⁰

By this time in the 1930s, Juárez García was a prominent missionary in the state, known throughout the Sierra Juárez and beyond, making him a potential target for the violence between religious groups. He also was a staunch supporter of *Cardenista* land reform projects. While his religion was certainly an important factor, his death also points to the connection between Protestantism and pro-revolutionary ideologies that were an anathema to traditionally Catholic communities. For Baptists, Juárez García's murder was religiously, not politically, motivated.

Memory and martyrdom

Exactly one year from the date of his murder, Catholics attended a vigil mass for Damián Ángeles on the evening of 4 October 1935 that lasted until the early morning hours of 5 October. The mass concluded the week-long celebration honouring Saint Jerome, the town's patron saint. That morning before dawn, a group of Catholics murdered Pastor Samuel Juárez García in his home along with five other *evangélicos* active in the agrarian society.⁷¹ The murder ensured Juárez García's martyrdom for Baptists in the village. Catholics disagree that his murder was religiously motivated and argue that Juárez García's death was just another example of *agrarista* violence that had plagued Mexico throughout the 1920s and 1930s, thus disconnecting religion from politics.

Elvira Cruz García, the eldest surviving Baptist in Tlacochahuaya, was only two years old at the time of the minister's murder, but she remembers her mother telling her about the morning of 5 October 1935: 'What happened there, I know about it because of my mother; my mother went to the *molino de nixtamal* [corn mill] that morning'.⁷² Cruz García said her mother waited at dawn to use Juárez García's mechanised corn mill but no one answered the door. Seconds later, a group of men and women rushed out of the house,

slamming the door. Cruz García alleges that one of the Catholic women had smashed Samuel Juárez García's head with a *metate* (flat grinding stone) after he was already wounded from shots to his chest, leaving a stain of blood on the wall behind him. 'The woman grabbed the *metate*...and she goes over and she hits him, she hit him on the head with the *metate*, resulting in the late Samuel's brains gushing out all over the wall'.⁷³ She said the stain on the wall is still there today. Cruz García described the minister's death:

What happened the year they killed Samuel, is very, how shall I put it, well remembered. So, there where he fell against the piles of corn, they beat him in the head and then his brain stained the wall behind him. And it doesn't matter how many times they tried to remove the stain, it has never disappeared. My father-in-law was doing some maintenance on that house. And in that room, said my father-in-law, he's said it several times, it's been painted and repainted but the stain never was removed. That's why I say that the blood is still demanding justice.⁷⁴

In Cruz García's interview, memory is social and shared. She knows what happened because of oral tradition passed down from her mother and her father-in-law.

Additionally, Cruz García's emphasis that Catholic women were involved in Juárez García's murder provides insight into the intersection of gender, religion and tradition. Cruz García's narrative suggests that the Catholic women transgressed proper gender roles by taking part in the murder. The fact that the assailant used a traditional and laborious domestic tool to engage in violence contrasts sharply with Cruz García's mother who was waiting patiently outside to grind her corn into tortilla *masa* (dough) using Juárez García's more efficient mechanised appliance. Indeed, the Agrarian Department under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40) promoted the *molino de nixtamal* as a means to eradicate the 'shameful slavery' rural women endured while each day hand grinding kernels.⁷⁵ In a sense, the Catholic women were smashing modernisation introduced by town native Juárez García, who as a Protestant, educated Spanish-speaker and local postmaster, epitomised the accomplishments of the Revolution. Elvira Cruz García's professional training as a nurse in northern Mexico is also significant. 'Well, back then there wasn't anyone around [in Tlacoahuaya] who knew how to inject medication, so I would do all the injections. I would go all over town attending to people'.⁷⁶ Cruz García recalled that ironically she was the one who decades later cared for the Catholic woman assailant when she was dying.

In the violent conflict in Tlacoahuaya, the state government did step in and call for an investigation. Ultimately, federal soldiers visited Tlacoahuaya and detained seven suspects who were arraigned in the district seat at Tlacolula. Oaxacan governor Anastasio García Toledo approved Juárez

García for a government-funded burial with honour in the civic cemetery.⁷⁷ The soldiers occupied Tlacoahuaya for several months and collected all firearms. As a result of Juárez García's death and continued tensions in the community between Catholics and Protestants, the National Baptist Convention abandoned its missionary work in Tlacoahuaya for several decades.⁷⁸

Cruz García has been at the forefront of the Baptist Church's efforts to depict Juárez García as a crucial indigenous Protestant martyr for Mexico, thus doubly inscribed as a martyr by religion and national identity given his political stance on agrarianism. When she describes his death, she always associates Juárez García with images of corn, collapsing in his home with stalks of corn surrounding him as if he blended into the corn and returned to the earth. It is significant that he falls onto corn stalks, back into the earth, which has ties to Christianity and pre-Hispanic sacredness. As the Baptists in town struggle to rebuild his church, Cruz García's belief that the minister's blood is still clamouring for justice suggests that she interprets his death as martyrdom for religious freedom in her town.

Such imagery is similar to the symbolism surrounding the 1919 murder of Revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, whose push for agrarian reform became the embodiment of Article 27 of the Constitution. Discussing the 1910 Zapatista Revolution in the context of the recent 1994 Zapatista uprising in neighboring Chiapas, one Oaxacan Zapotec woman stated in 1995: 'Zapata saw the suffering of the peasants...that is why he died'.⁷⁹ During the 1930s agrarian movement that Juárez García supported, President Cárdenas and the Ministry of Education had appropriated Zapata as a symbol of the national government. As Mary Kay Vaughn explains: 'When the SEP constructed Zapata as a hero, they sanitized him: He did not drink, womanize, or gamble, nor did he carry the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe'.⁸⁰ Such imagery and symbolism creates martyrs out of both Zapata and Juárez García on national, indigenous and religious levels. Zapata's 'sanitized' values and Christ-like sacrifices mirror those that Protestants were trying to emulate. Such values are examples of respectable masculinity that are used to encourage men to abstain from Catholic traditions and convert to Protestantism.⁸¹ Thus, Cruz García's description of the former minister's death straddles Protestant, indigenous and national identities.

Catholics contest the union of religion and politics as the reason for Juárez García's death and its impact on the community. Catholic Carlos Martínez has a very different perspective on religious conflict in Tlacoahuaya and offers insight into current problems with Protestants not contributing to community fiestas. Martínez, who was thirteen years old in 1935, recalled that many Tlacoahuayans (Catholic and Protestant) fled the town and sought refuge in Oaxaca City or relocated to Mexico City during this time. His family left for six months out of fear there would be more violence in retribution for Juárez

García's murder. Martínez recalled:

The Protestants used to call us owls because we'd go to mass very early, before dawn. In the 1930s, they began to burn images of the saints. I was thirteen years old in 1935 and I remember when the Catholics did their religious processions, the Protestants tried to offend the Catholics on the day of San Jerónimo [town patron saint], September 30th. They began to march and collect images of the saints to burn. They would shout, 'Here goes another one!' I ask you if this is evidence of progress and knowledge for our town? We [the Catholics] were not agrarianists because we didn't want to be such loudmouths. However, the funny thing is that although they [Protestants] say that Catholics are friends of the devil because we drink, they have no problem accepting mescal in a party if it's free. But, they won't give any money [toward a festivity] because they hide behind their religion.⁸²

Martínez, like many Catholics in his town, interprets Protestant opposition to traditional rituals or customs as politically and financially, not religiously, motivated. By asserting that Catholics did not want to be such loudmouths, Martínez is also implying that the Protestants were all talk and no action. Finally, he also elucidates the conflict at the core of religious conflicts in Oaxacan native communities today: Protestants tend to promote individualism instead of collective identity by abstaining from the town's patron saint day *fiesta*.⁸³

Martínez's interview raises important questions about the relationship between tradition, notions of respectable masculinity and Protestantism in indigenous communities. Religious conversion created a different set of problems for closely knit communities.⁸⁴ For example, what is the impact of Protestantism on the annual patron saint fiesta, participation in non-remunerated *tequio* (communal work) projects and fulfilment of a *cargo* (civil-religious hierarchy) position, all concepts that Zapotec Catholics argue are key components of communal identity?⁸⁵ New converts, as Martínez's interview suggests, chose not to participate consistently or at all in the fiesta system. In contrast, Protestants argue that many of the community rituals involved alcohol and dancing and that the collective labour projects served the Catholic churches where they no longer worshipped. Religious conflicts continued to invoke these same focal points – especially collective labour projects and participation in fiestas – components that were closely associated with indigenous identity.

After Juárez García's death, his church remained empty for almost seventy-five years. His followers worshipped in their homes or travelled to Oaxaca City to attend services at other churches. Today, Baptist women in Tlacoahuaya are working to revitalise Juárez García's legacy by rebuilding his church and presenting his murder as a central example of Protestant

martyrdom in Oaxaca. School curriculums only recently started teaching about the *Cristiada* rebellion and the execution of Catholic clergy who refused to abide by the Federal restrictions on public displays of religion in the late 1920s.⁸⁶ Protestants want to be a part of this history of struggle for religious freedom but not in opposition to the state; rather, they feel that they helped advance the cultural benefits of the 1910 Revolution by bringing literacy, healthcare and freedom from the ‘yoke’ of Catholicism. This narrative breaks from the official story of twentieth-century martyrdom in Mexico that tends to focus on the Jesuits and other priests killed in central western Mexico between 1926 and 1929. Juárez García’s martyrdom also competes with indigenous martyrs from the Sierra Norte who died defending Catholic missionaries in the colonial era.⁸⁷ It is also significant that Cruz García focuses on the concept of martyrdom – often thought of as an intimately Catholic theme – in her memories of the late pastor. Like late nineteenth-century missionary Melinda Rankin, who reminded Protestants to ‘take up the banner of the fallen Stephen’, Cruz García is advancing the story of Samuel Juárez García’s murder and restoring his church as a means to integrate Baptist history into the historical narrative. In a region like Oaxaca with a rich colonial history, the Catholic sacred sites stand out: the shrine to the Virgin Mary in Juchitán, the Dominican convent where Independence leader José María Morelos was executed or, more importantly, Tlacochoauaya’s sixteenth-century Dominican church which still maintains its original murals made from the traditional Oaxacan *cochineal* dye.

To begin forming Baptists’ century-long history in Oaxaca, Elvira Cruz García, her daughters and her extended family are actively working with the Convención Bautista to restore the church – now overgrown with weeds and on the verge of collapsing – and celebrate services on the original site. At present, however, they are embroiled in a lawsuit with neighbours over the boundaries of the property. As they rebuild the church and defend the original property lines, the Tlacochohuayan Baptists have received visits from the Texas-based organisation ‘Go and Tell Ministries’.⁸⁸ The involvement of a North American missionary organisation affirms the continued strength of transnational missionary organisations in Oaxaca.



Figure 3: Aurora and Salomón Hernández Juárez holding a framed picture of Samuel Juárez García. Photograph: © the author.

Zapotec Baptists are forming a history that asserts their claims to martyrdom, tradition and patriotism. The abandoned 1926 church is a testament to Protestants' contested history in the community. The mantels in their homes showcase old photographs from Juárez García's ministry in Tlacoahuaya arranged carefully between vases of flowers, similar to a Catholic home altar but missing the Virgin of Guadalupe and patron saints. As oral history theorist Lynn Abrams elucidates, 'historical memory, is a memory (or a representation) of a past that is lost, whereas collective memory is anchored in the social group that actively preserves and reinterprets that past via the consciousness of those who are still alive'.⁸⁹ Cruz García was not present when the Baptist minister was murdered, yet the shared memory of the church's history lived on so strongly in her family that she felt an intimate connection. Abrams suggests that shared memory can have 'such a powerful impact on those growing up within it that they have adopted the memories as their own and seek to ensure that these memories (and the victims) are not forgotten'.⁹⁰ In Tlacoahuaya, Baptist Protestant memory is straddling both the collective and historical realms. Yet this memory is also gendered; Cruz García focuses her narrative on a description of how women participated in the murder of the Baptist minister. She also affirms that she knows what happened because her mother shared this story with her. Cruz García acts as a protector of the Baptist church's intimate but contested memory in the community yet she also enters the legal realm of the Oaxaca City court system

to regain the original territory owned by the Baptist Church in 1926.

Conclusion

Northern Mexican Baptist missionary women interpreted Zapotec culture and gender norms as frustrating obstacles in attaining dual (and at times competing) Mexican/Christian identities. These women uniformly viewed Zapotecs as 'subjugated by idolatry and ignorance'.⁹¹ Similar to the goals of public school teachers, social workers and activists in post-revolutionary Mexico, Protestant women sought to bring the tenets of the Mexican Revolution to native communities.⁹² The *Unión Femenil* members saw it as their duty as more 'fortunate sisters' to introduce Protestantism to indigenous Mexico. Baptist women sought to 'dignify' the lives of their Zapotec 'sisters' by emphasising the moral autonomy and basic civil rights Zapotec women lacked in Tlacoahuaya.⁹³ Seventy-five years later, Zapotec Baptist Elvira Cruz García argues that Protestantism brought progress to her town; however, she maintains that her family has always been able to negotiate Protestant values with Zapotec traditions. Practising 'respectable masculinity' by not drinking, gambling or engaging in domestic violence was an important set of values Protestant missionaries and post-revolutionary administrations promoted. Her husband, as a *Regidor* (town delegate) and later municipal president, took part in local festivities, but he offered *atole* (a traditional corn-based beverage) and *tamales* at his house during the town's feast day, never alcohol. Cruz García contends that Baptist congregants still participate in *tequio* and have maintained fluency in the Zapotec language.⁹⁴

In southern Mexico, where Catholic images are ubiquitous in colourful public murals, in sixteenth-century Dominican cathedrals and on plastic market bags, *lucha libre* (wrestling) masks, belt buckles and home altars, the religious battle lines in Oaxaca symbolically begin over worship of the Virgin and the patron saint celebrations. For Protestants, the Virgin of Guadalupe (or the Virgin of Juquila or La Soledad) is not their brown mother but merely a tool of conquest whose entrenched presence in Oaxacan homes and worship sites is dangerous and blasphemous, a product of colonialism and fanaticism. Instead, in Protestant homes, businesses and churches, President Benito Juárez is presented as a spiritual father while missionaries, especially indigenous ones like Samuel Juárez García, are revered as the fruition of his liberal Reform period legislation further strengthened by the 1917 constitutional limits on the Catholic Church's authority.



Figure 4: Feast Day of St. Jerome, Tlacoachahuaya, 30 September 2010.
Photograph: © the author.

Post-revolutionary Zapotec Baptists attempted to create their own sacred space and sense of community, which in turn impacted new social organisation and identity in Tlacoachahuaya. The imagery surrounding Samuel Juárez García's death links Baptists in the community to an indigenous, Christian and Mexican narrative that transcends their community and connects them with a larger narrative of martyrdom and patriotism.⁹⁵ Although it is but one case, it demonstrates the intersection of nationalism, gender and ethnic identities, tradition and memory.

Elvira Cruz García promotes a collective history in one sense by working to restore the former pastor's legacy and rebuild his church. But at the same time, she is asserting a blended, negotiated sense of community obligation that integrates her faith with her Zapotec identity and the *cargo* obligations of her community: something members of the *Unión Femenil* did not predict almost a century earlier when they lamented that 'all of their customs are daughters of their religion'.

Notes

I am grateful for comments received from participants in the *Gender & History* Colloquium at the University of York in autumn 2012 as well as to the anonymous reviewer at *Gender & History*. I also thank Linda B. Hall, Erik Loomis, Sue Taylor and Leah Sneider for reading earlier versions of this

article. All translations from the original Spanish are the author's own, unless otherwise noted.

- 1 Esther G. de Montes, 'Un Llamado a la Mujer Cristiana Mexicana', in 'Sección de la Unión Femenil y Del Hogar', *El Atalaya Bautista: Semanario Evangélico Bautista* 8/5 (El Paso, TX), 2 February 1922, p. 73.
- 2 Founded in 1903, the National Baptist Convention of Mexico was financially supported by Northern and Southern Baptist boards of the United States.
- 3 Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), *XIII Censo de Población y Vivienda*, 2010, Oaxaca.
- 4 *Mestizo* is an ambiguous term. In its most simplistic form, it means individuals who are of Spanish and indigenous heritage. It is also socially constructed; one becomes *mestizo* by speaking Spanish, dressing in western clothing and shedding *costumbres del pueblo* (customs of the village). For the post-revolutionary Mexican government, it was essential to integrate indigenous Mexicans into mainstream *mestizo* culture. See Ronald Loewe, *Maya or Mestizo? Nationalism, Modernity and its Discontents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011) for a discussion of indigenous identity in contemporary Yucatán. See also Lynn Stephen, 'The Creation and Re-Creation of Ethnicity: Lessons from the Zapotec and Mixtec of Oaxaca', *Latin American Perspectives* 23/2 (1996), pp. 17–37, esp. pp. 19–20 for a brief discussion of the construction of the *indio*/*mestizo* paradigm in Mexico.
- 5 For background to the Protestant opening in Mexico during the mid-to-late nineteenth century and Protestants' perceptions of Latin American Catholicism, see the monthly missionary periodical, *The Gospel in all Lands*, published by the Methodist Episcopal Society; W. Reginald Wheeler, *Modern Missions in Mexico* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1925); Webster E. Browning, *Roman Christianity in Latin America* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1924); Melinda Rankin, *Twenty Years among the Mexicans: A Narrative of Missionary Labor* (Cincinnati: Chase & Hall, 1875); Monica Orozco, 'Not to be Called Christian: Protestant Perceptions of Catholicism in Nineteenth Century Latin America', in Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry (eds), *Religion and Society in Latin America: Interpretive Essays from Conquest to Present* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), pp. 175–90.
- 6 Lucius C. Smith, 'The People of the State of Oaxaca', *The Gospel in all Lands* (April 1893), pp. 145–8, here pp. 146–7, 148.
- 7 De Montes, 'Un Llamado a la Mujer Cristiana Mexicana'.

- 8 Reverend J. W. Bain, 'Woman's Power in Saving the West', *Home Mission Monthly* 1 (April 1887), p. 126; R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 13–57. See also Susan M. Yohn, *A Contest of Faiths: Missionary Women and Pluralism in the American Southwest* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), for a comparison of Presbyterian female missionaries working in Hispano-Catholic communities of northern New Mexico; Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 13.
- 9 E. Barocio, 'Nuestra Capilla en Tlacoachahuaya', *El Atalaya Bautista* 12/32, 12 August 1926, p. 596.
- 10 During the 1926–29 *Cristiada* rebellion, 90,000 Mexicans lost their lives. In 2000, Pope John Paul II canonised twenty-five Mexican priests as martyrs for dying for the Catholic faith. See also n. 39 below.
- 11 See Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 78–105, for her discussion on the oral historian's use of memory as a source.
- 12 For the foundational scholarship on the rise of Protestantism in Latin America, see David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Religion in Modern Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000); David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). For scholarship specifically on Mexican Protestantism, see Jean-Pierre Bastian, *Protestantismo y Sociedad en México* (Mexico City: Ediciones Cupsa, 1983); Enrique Marroquín Zaleta, *El conflicto religioso: Oaxaca, 1976–1992* (Oaxaca de Juárez: UABJO, 2007); Kurt Bowen, *Evangelism and Apostasy: The Evolution and Impact of Evangelicals in Modern Mexico* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). For Protestantism's impact on indigenous communities, see James Dow, 'The Expansion of Protestantism in Mexico: An Anthropological View', *Anthropological Quarterly* 78 (2005), pp. 827–50; Carlos Garma Navarro, *Protestantismo en una comunidad Totonaca de Puebla* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1987); Toomas Gross, 'Protestantism and Modernity: The Implications of Religious Change in Rural Oaxaca', *Sociology of Religion* 64 (2003), pp. 479–98.
- 13 In her autobiography, seamstress Evangelina Corona Cadena describes how her ability to direct a Mexico City garment workers' union stemmed from

confidence she gained by taking on leadership positions in her Presbyterian church. See Evangelina Corona Cadena, *Contar las cosas como fueron* (Mexico City: DEMAC, 2007). See also Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Timothy J. Steigenga and David A. Smilde, 'Wrapped in the Holy Shawl: The Strange Case of Conservative Christians and Gender Equality in Latin America', in Christian Smith and Joshua Prokopy (eds), *Latin American Religion in Motion: Tracking Innovation, Complexity and Unexpected Change* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 173–86; see Lesley Gill, "'Like a Veil to Cover Them": Women and the Pentecostal Movement in La Paz', *American Ethnologist* 17 (1990), pp. 708–21 for ground-breaking scholarship on Protestantism and gender in Latin America.

- 14 See Ramona Pérez, 'Fiesta as Tradition, Fiesta as Change: Ritual, Alcohol and Violence in a Mexican Community', *Addiction* 95 (2000), pp. 365–73; Lynn Stephen, *Zapotec Women: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Globalized Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Kristin Norget, 'Progressive Theology and Popular Religiosity in Oaxaca, Mexico', in Smith and Prokopy (eds), *Latin American Religion in Motion*, pp. 91–110.
- 15 Sault argues that, due to a strong sense of social-religious obligation that Catholic women possess through their roles as godmothers, Zapotec women convert at slower rates than Zapotec men. Her work differs from the findings of Brusco in Colombia who argues that conversion to Protestantism resulted in a form of female collective action by elevating domesticity and reattaching badly behaved husbands to the family.
- 16 Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, p. 200.
- 17 Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, pp. 96–101.
- 18 Kristina Boylan, 'Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation: Mexican Catholic Women's Activism, 1917–1940', in Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan and Gabriela Cano (eds), *Sex and Revolution: Gender, Politics and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 199–222, here p. 201.
- 19 Marjorie Becker, 'Torching La Purísima, Dancing at the Altar: The Construction of Revolutionary Hegemony in Michoacán, 1934–1940', in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (eds), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 247–64.
- 20 Vaughan, quoting SEP's journal, *El Maestro*, describes how teaching Mexican history through cultural celebration (mural art, folklore, dance)

- served 'not just to cultivate ideas, but to awaken, invigorate, and extend sentiments of love for the nationality, the only thing which can save us', (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1921 a:3), quoted in Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools, 1930–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), p. 42. For teachers as political organisers in Yucatán, see Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, pp. 96–101.
- 21 Deborah Baldwin, *Protestants and the Mexican Revolution: Missionaries, Ministers, and Social Change* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 81.
 - 22 See Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, for an in-depth examination of new opportunities for women in the Secretaría de Educación Pública; Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), for women and agrarian ideology; Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, for an analysis of women's organising in post-revolutionary Yucatán. Monica Orozco's forthcoming monograph on US missionary organisations in late nineteenth-century Mexico promises an in-depth analysis of gender in the conversion process, though her focus remains centred on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in northern Mexico. Orozco, 'Not to be Called Christian. See also Susan M. Yohn, *A Contest of Faiths: Missionary Women and Pluralism in the American Southwest* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), for a comparison of Presbyterian women missionaries working in Hispano-Catholic communities of northern New Mexico.
 - 23 The 1857 Liberal Constitution limited Catholic Church landholdings, clerical privileges and essentially legalised Protestantism. See Edwin Munsell Bliss, *A Concise History of Missions* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1897), for background on US missionary organisations in late nineteenth-century Mexico.
 - 24 Baldwin, *Protestants and the Mexican Revolution*, p. 17, quoting Juárez's biographer Justo Sierra.
 - 25 Rankin, *Twenty Years Among the Mexicans*, p. 213.
 - 26 Rankin, *Twenty Years Among the Mexicans*, pp. 213–14.
 - 27 Rankin, *Twenty Years Among the Mexicans*, pp. 198–9. See Acts of the Apostles, 7: 59–60, for the description of first Christian deacon Stephen's death in 35 CE.
 - 28 Rankin, *Twenty Years among the Mexicans*, pp. 198–9.
 - 29 Baptist Church General Missionary to Mexico, A. B. Rudd, stated in 1917

- that, 'Mexicans, rather than North Americans, must evangelise this country. Our work is to prepare the men for this work. God help me to do this and keep the way open for us!' Margaret T. Rudd, *A Practical Mystic: A. B. Rudd*, (Annandale, VA: Chares Baptie Studios, Inc., 1987), p. 96.
- 30 In particular, Article 24 forbade *culto* (worship) outside of *templos* (church buildings) effectively outlawing holy day processions and saint's day fiestas. See Kathleen M. McIntyre, 'Contested Spaces: Protestantism in Oaxaca, 1920–1995' (Doctoral thesis, University of New Mexico, 2012), p. 39.
 - 31 See John Beekman, 'Minimizing Religious Syncretism among the Chols' *Practical Anthropology* 6 (1959), pp. 241–50, for advice given to evangelical missionaries in how to advise new converts to abstain from drinking, displaying images of Catholic saints in their homes and burning candles during worship. For a good discussion of the origins of 'popular' or 'folk' Mexican Catholicism, see Martin A. Nesvig (ed.), *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).
 - 32 Alejandro Treviño Osuna, 'Convención Nacional Bautista de México: Por Nuestros Campos', *El Atalaya Bautista* 12/18, 5 May 1921, p. 5.
 - 33 Josué G. Bautista, 'Historia de las misiones Bautistas entre los Indios de México', *El Atalaya Bautista* 7/48, 1 December 1921, p. 4.
 - 34 Samuel Juárez García, 'Entre los Zapotecas', *El Atalaya Bautista* 8/5, 2 February 1922, p. 80.
 - 35 See Deborah Poole, 'An Image of "Our Indian": Type Photographs and Racial Sentiments in Oaxaca, 1920–1940', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84 (2004), pp. 37–82, for a discussion of post-revolutionary intellectual and political manipulation of Oaxaca's ethnic diversity to promote the state's interests.
 - 36 Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 49–50.
 - 37 Samuel Juárez García, 'Informe Anual de la Junta Misionera: La obra entre los Indios', *El Atalaya Bautista*, 7/28 and 29, 14 July 1921, p. 812.
 - 38 Juárez García, 'Entre los Zapotecas', pp. 5–6.
 - 39 The *Cristiada* (1926–29) was a civil war between Catholic peasants (*cristeros*) and the Mexican government, stemming from the anti-clerical provisions of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. 90,000 Mexican soldiers, *cristeros* and civilians lost their lives during the rebellion. For the

foundational work on the *Cristiada* rebellion, see Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People between Church and State, 1926–1929* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Jean Meyer, *El conflicto religioso en Oaxaca, 1926–1938* (Oaxaca de Juárez: CIESAS, 2006), for a regional example of *Cristero* and post-*cristero* violence in Oaxaca.

- 40 Juárez García, 'Entre los Zapotecas'.
- 41 De Montes, 'Un Llamado a la Mujer Cristiana Mexicana'.
- 42 De Montes, 'Un Llamado a la Mujer Cristiana Mexicana'.
- 43 De Montes, 'Un Llamado a la Mujer Cristiana Mexicana'.
- 44 Amada T. de García, 'A Raíz de la Convención Nacional', *El Atalaya Bautista*, 8/45, 11 November 1922, p. 714.
- 45 Amada T. de García, 'Capilla de Tlacoahuaya', *El Atalaya Bautista*, 11/48, 26 November 1925, p. 1149.
- 46 At the basic level, *usos y costumbres*, or ways and customs of the people, is a set of collective norms that indigenous communities rely on for self-government. Currently, three-quarters of Oaxaca's municipalities operate by customary law. For background on the historical significance of the cargo system, see John K. Chance and William B. Taylor, 'Cofradías and Cargos: An Historical Perspective on the Mesoamerican Civil-religious Hierarchy', *American Ethnologist* 12 (1986), pp. 1–26.
- 47 See Kathleen M. McIntyre, 'Contested Spaces', pp. 202–13, for a case study of San Juan Tabaá, in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte. In June 1983, San Juan Tabaá Pentecostals complained to Oaxacan governor Pedro Vásquez Colmenares that Catholics were forcing them to help renovate the Catholic Church in Tabaá. The municipal authorities threatened the thirty-eight Pentecostal families living in Tabaá with expulsion, prohibition from using the communal corn grinder and lynching if they did not contribute to the project, justifying these actions by reminding the Pentecostals that their town had always practiced *tequios*. Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca (AGEPEO), Oaxaca, Expediente 2/347/15704, Alejandro Sobarzo Loaiza to Pedro Vásquez Colmenares, 2 August 1983.
- 48 This Baptist news journal was published in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez from 1908–30; then its name switched to *La Luz Bautista*.
- 49 Samuel Juárez García, 'Capilla Bautista de Tlacoahuaya, Oaxaca', *El Atalaya Bautista*, 12/30, 29 July 1926, p. 564.
- 50 Juárez García, 'Capilla Bautista de Tlacoahuaya'.
- 51 Juárez García, 'Capilla Bautista de Tlacoahuaya'.

- 52 E. Boracio, 'Nuestra Capilla de Tlacoachahuaya', *El Atalaya Bautista* 12/32, 12 August 1926, p. 596.
- 53 Raquel A. Delgado, 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas', *El Atalaya Bautista*, 12/24, 17 June 1926, pp. 468–9, here p. 468.
- 54 Delgado, 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas', pp. 468–9.
- 55 Delgado, 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas', p. 468.
- 56 See Carolyn Gallaher, 'The Role of Protestant Missionaries in Mexico's Indigenous Awakening', *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26 (2007), pp. 88–111, for a discussion of conversion to Protestantism stemming from free access to missionary clinics. For Seventh Day Adventist health clinics in Mexico, see C. E. Conwell, 'The Need of Medical Missions in Mexico', *Medical Missionary* 22 (1913), pp. 319–23.
- 57 Ironically, some of the very practices the Baptist women condemned, such as saving umbilical cords, are currently expensive and highly recommended medical practices in the western world.
- 58 Delgado, 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas', pp. 468–9. For further background on Zapotec traditional healing practices, see Stephen, *Zapotec Women*; Alicia M. Barabas, *Dones, dueños y santos: Ensayo sobre religiones en Oaxaca*, (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2006).
- 59 Delgado, 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas', p. 468.
- 60 Delgado, 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas', p. 468.
- 61 Delgado, 'Costumbres Típicas de los Zapotecas', p. 469.
- 62 See Laura A. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 172–3, for her conceptualisation of sanctioned/unsanctioned spaces in colonial Mexico and the roles of Spaniards, mestizos and indigenous peoples in creating, negotiating, and disputing these domains.
- 63 Moisés Arévalo, 'La Obra Misionera Entre los Zapotecas', *El Atalaya Bautista*, 13/9, 3 March 1927, pp. 135 and 139, here p. 139.
- 64 Meyer, *El conflicto religioso en Oaxaca*, p. 3.
- 65 'Visita Pastoral', *Revista Oficial del Arzobispado de Antequera* 2 (September 1923), pp. 70–71.
- 66 'Visita Pastoral'.
- 67 See Jean Meyer, 'Religious Conflict and Catholic Resistance in 1930s

- Oaxaca', in Matthew Butler (ed.), *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), for background information on religious conflict in *cardenista* Oaxaca.
- 68 'Asesinato Cometido en Tlacoahuaya', *El Informador*, 4 October 1934.
- 69 AGEPEO, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, Mexico, Dirección Jurídica y de Gobierno, Pleitos Religiosos, Tlacoahuaya, 1934.
- 70 'Pugna política en Tlacoahuaya: Se atribuye la intranquilidad al Sr. S. J. García', *El Informador*, 1 January 1935.
- 71 *Hombres de Dios que dejaron Huella: 100 Biografías de pastores Bautistas Mexicanos*, ed. Fernando de la Mora Rivas (Guadalajara: Convención Nacional Bautista de México, 2004), p. 54.
- 72 Elvira Cruz García, interview with author, Tlacoahuaya, Oaxaca, 2 October 2009.
- 73 Cruz García, interview with author, Tlacoahuaya, Oaxaca, 2 October 2009.
- 74 Cruz García, interview with author, Tlacoahuaya, Oaxaca, 2 October 2009.
- 75 Jocelyn Olcott, quoting the Mexican Agrarian Department pamphlet, ¡*Despertar Lagunero!*, in *Revolutionary Women*, p. 148. Olcott also quotes an Agrarian Department official who described how rural women cheered: 'Here are the mills! Away with the metates!' Olcott, quoting ¡*Despertar Lagunero!*, in *Revolutionary Women*, p. 148.
- 76 Cruz García, interview with author, Tlacoahuaya, Oaxaca, 2 October 2009.
- 77 'Como Fue El Sangriento Motín Que Ocurrió En Un Pueblo De Oaxaca', *Continental*, 13 October 1935. See also 'Edictos', in *Periódico Oficial del Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca*, 14 December 1935, p. 340.
- 78 CNBM ran the G. H. Lacy Baptist seminary in Tlacolula, Oaxaca from 1938–43 before it moved to Puebla and then finally returned it to the city of Oaxaca from 1960–present. However, the CNBM did not reestablish missionary work in Tlacoahuaya until 2005, <<http://www.seminariolacy.org/>> (accessed 1 July 2012). See also 'Recuperación de la obra', *La Luz Bautista*, 19 (April 2007), p. 5.
- 79 Angela López Martínez, as quoted in Lynn Stephen, ¡*Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 304.

- 80 Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, p. 42.
- 81 On the relationship between respectable masculinity and Protestant conversion, see Eliza F. Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Brusco, *Reformation of Machismo*. For a discussion of the post-revolutionary masculine ideals for Mexican men, see Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, pp. 18–19. Olcott notes that post-revolutionary governments advocated team sports like baseball and basketball over boxing or cockfighting as a respectable form of masculine recreation. Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, p. 19.
- 82 Carlos Martínez, interview with author, Tlacoachahuaya, Oaxaca, 30 September 2009.
- 83 See McIntyre, ‘Contested Spaces’, pp. 156–7, for a discussion of Protestant conversion and individualism. See also James B. Greenberg, ‘Sanctity and Resistance in Closed Corporate Indigenous Communities: Coffee Money, Violence, and Ritual Organization in Chatino Communities in Oaxaca’, in Lynn Stephen and James Dow (eds), *Class, Politics and Popular Religion in Mexico and Central America* (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1990), pp. 95–114, for a discussion of the *fiesta* system and civil-religious hierarchies.
- 84 Joseph Lee discusses a similar conflict with missionaries’ disruption of customary law and rituals with respect to ancestor shrines and communal water work in South China during the 1890s. Discussing Presbyterians’ reluctance to financially support traditional celebrations in a former ancestral temple in the Hainan Province, Lee concludes: ‘Whenever Christian identity took precedence over communal identity, confrontation with the non-Christians was only a matter of time’. Joseph Lee, *The Bible and the Gun: Christianity in South China, 1860–1900* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 125, quotation on p. 153.
- 85 For *usos y costumbres*, see note 46 above.
- 86 David Naglieri, ‘Freedom is our Lives’, *Columbia*, May 2012, p. 10.
- 87 Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 1–2, 127.
- 88 http://www.goandtellmexico.org/Ministries/The_Oaxaca_Project/ (accessed 1 July 2012).
- 89 Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, pp. 100–01.
- 90 Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 101.

- 91 De Montes, 'Un Llamado a la Mujer Cristiana Mexicana'.
- 92 See Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935–1985*, for an in-depth analysis of the relationship of the Mexican government with the North American missionary organisation, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL).
- 93 See Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, p. 19, for a discussion of the (limited) benefits for women's rights in the 1917 Law of Family Relations and the 1928 Mexican Civil Code.
- 94 Cruz García, interview with author, Tlacoachahuaya, Oaxaca, 2 October 2009. Anthropologists Michael Kearney and Carole Nagengast describe *tequio* as 'an ancient system of obligation that has been utilised by the Aztecs and Mixtecs for community projects', Michael Kearney and Carole Nagengast, 'Mixtec Ethnicity: Social Identity, Political Consciousness, and Political Activism', *Latin American Research Review* 25 (1990), p. 89.
- 95 See Stephen, *Zapata Lives!*, pp. 300–08, for a discussion of the links between *zapatismo* and indigenous identity in Oaxaca.

Creating the ‘Problem Hindu’: *Sati*, Thuggee and Female Infanticide in India, 1800–60

Daniel J. R. Grey

During the nineteenth century, British writers on India regularly invoked the physical, as well as moral, dangers of Hinduism, representing believers as not only in thrall to ‘idolatry’ but as potentially murderous when seeking to appease their gods. The sensational killings that so vividly filled the colonial imagination and which have provided fertile ground for historians, in particular the examples of *sati* (‘suttee’ or ‘widow-burning’), ‘thuggee’ (*thagi*, the supposed ‘strangler cult’) and female infanticide, were uniquely represented as *Hindu* crimes, rather than secular ‘Indian’ ones that might be perpetrated regardless of religious affiliation.¹ This study is the first work to jointly examine the continuities and changes in British representation of three distinct but related issues (*sati*, thuggee and female infanticide) that were held to exemplify the dangers of Hinduism from a gendered perspective. It analyses the years between the turn of the nineteenth century and 1860, when the imposition of the Indian Penal Code and the creation of the High Courts in the wake of the 1857 Great Rebellion caused a dramatic shake-up of earlier colonial policy and practice relating to law, crime and punishment.² Such dangers were perceived as primarily resulting in the victimisation of women and girls, but also in generating the supposedly flawed masculinity that adherence to the religion created in Indian men, veering sharply into either effeminacy or barbarism. These ideas, along with the colonial belief that following a particular faith in India led to ritualised and set patterns of behaviour – up to and including violence towards the self or others as acts designed to propitiate a deity – were persistently repeated, even when parallels could be drawn directly with the behaviour of Christian or freethinking men and women in Britain. Likewise, instances of Muslim men and women participating in crimes that were believed to be ‘Hindu problems’, such as female infanticide, were carefully dismissed or ignored as individual aberrations well into the twentieth century.³ Singling out Hindus in these discourses of gendered violence also ignored the fact that by the 1700s, as Susan Bayly has noted, there was frequently a distinct overlap between elite Muslim and Hindu attitudes to gender, sexuality and what constituted appropriate behavioural and dress norms.⁴

Few studies have considered British perspectives on *sati*, *thagi* and female

infanticide in concert, preferring to treat each as distinct issues.⁵ While *sati* and female infanticide were issues that impacted exclusively on the lives (and deaths) of women and girls, and thus could be utilised in both nineteenth-century colonial justifications of the need to ‘bring civilisation to the heathen’ and postcolonial critiques of misogyny in India, thuggee stands out as a rare type of supposed ‘uniquely Indian’ homicide which was almost exclusively perpetrated both by and against men. Indeed, as I shall explain below, colonial officials found that there was a deeply held belief among those they identified as part of the alleged ‘Thug cult’ that those robbers who dared to break the traditional prohibition on killing women or girls invited near-instantaneous divine retribution from their patron goddess, Kālī. To date, however, the implications of what studying *thagi* might reveal about constructions of masculinity in nineteenth-century India have been largely ignored by scholars. While examining *sati*, *thagi* and female infanticide separately is an understandable decision, since each of these subjects generated a vast amount of both elite and popular anxiety and debate (not to mention voluminous records) in their own right, my interest here is how considering these themes *together* as part of a perceived continuum of imagined ‘Hindu violence’ can help build up a more nuanced picture of British attitudes to gender, race and religion in India during the nineteenth century than currently exists. As Esme Cleall has noted in her exploration of missionary attitudes to race and gender in nineteenth-century India and Southern Africa:

Although the imagination of Africa as a ‘dark continent’, or *sati* and female infanticide in India, have already been much examined by postcolonial scholars, ‘violence’ as a concept, is seldom used to think about such phenomena *together*.⁶

‘Of What Concerns Women’: Hindu femininity and victimhood

The enduring belief that Hindu women and girls were, in essence, eternal victims to the vicarious whims and violent abuses of their male relatives stretching across the life-cycle from cradle to grave was already a well-established viewpoint in colonial circles by the end of the eighteenth century. This impression did not simply rest on familiarity with the repeated depictions of *sati* that were ubiquitous in the post-medieval accounts of European travellers in India, but seemed to have received additional verification through recent translations of what was commonly referred to as ‘Hindu law’.⁷ In order both to implement wider reforms designed to strengthen and legitimise British claims to rule as successors to the Mughals, and to substantially decrease the costs of administration in India, Governor-General Warren Hastings believed that it was an essential step to develop a greater understanding of Hindu theology from its sacred texts.⁸ Since there was no

British person who could read Sanskrit at this time, it was necessary for Hastings's chosen agent, the orientalist scholar Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, to collaborate extensively with pundits invited from across Bengal. These men provided him with translations of Vedic scriptures from Sanskrit into Persian, and which Halhed then translated himself into English 'with an equal Attention to the Closeness and Fidelity of the Version'.⁹ In practice, however, the translation differed significantly from the original works and is much more accurately understood as a rather garbled revision which introduced a number of Persianate terms, ignored anything considered 'irrelevant' to jurisprudence (thus missing out key elements, given the emphasis on the crucial interrelationship of different ideas and states of being in Hindu cosmology) and imposed British understandings of kinship, rights and duties.¹⁰ Halhed's compilation was published in London in 1776 as *A Code of Gentoo Laws*, the first work designed to bring broader understandings of Hindu law to a British audience, and it was subsequently translated into French and German editions. The book did not receive a universally warm welcome in either Britain or India, despite its ongoing use as a reference point for the East India Company.¹¹ Aside from any other point, some readers considered the suggestion that Hindu sacred texts might have been written as much as 5,000 years earlier stretched credulity to beyond breaking point: 'that there were any Writings so old as this, doth not appear'.¹²

As Nandini Bhattacharya-Panda has pointed out, these early colonial attempts to codify Hindu law and custom were inherently gendered, and as such had correspondingly far-reaching and enduring implications for colonial understandings of supposedly 'authentic' Hindu gender roles – including the treatment of hotly debated issues like *sati*.¹³ Halhed's tome provided British readers with a blunt and overwhelmingly negative assessment of Hindu feminine characteristics under the heading 'Of What Concerns Women':

Women have Six Qualities; the First, an inordinate Desire for Jewels and fine Furniture, handsome Cloaths [sic], and nice Victuals; the Second, immoderate Lust; the Third, violent Anger; the Fourth, deep Resentment (i.e.) no Person knows the Sentiments concealed in their Heart; the Fifth, another Person's Good appears Evil in their Eyes; the Sixth, they commit bad Actions.¹⁴

For widows, it was further asserted in the *Code* that, whenever possible, they should join the corpse of their husband on the funeral pyre, and thereby guarantee for both parties a place in Paradise. If this were not possible, she was strictly enjoined to live a humble and chaste life with no possibility of remarriage 'and if she does not preserve her Chastity, she goes to Hell'.¹⁵ This expectation that for wives, only their husband provided an acceptable outlet for the exploration of sexuality (a viewpoint hardly unique to either Hinduism or Indian society) – and one, moreover, which ended forever at his death – was mirrored in countless writings on Hinduism (both Indian and

European) in the period covered by this article.¹⁶ The deep-seated influence of these doctrines was regularly offered as an explanation by colonial commentators when no obvious evidence could be found that pointed to coercion of a woman who might commit *sati*. Instances in which such coercion was suspected or proved, however, provided excellent opportunities for British authorities to demonstrate the ‘civilising benefit’ of their rule in the early nineteenth century, despite the avowed intention of non-interference in Indian religion. The decision of the district magistrate at Bihar to prevent the *sati* of a twelve-year-old widow in 1805, while presented as a humanitarian intervention, nonetheless conveyed considerable anxiety that his actions might lead to protests at interference in Hindu practices, and attempted to justify this step on the grounds the intended *sati* was ‘in a perfect state of stupefaction, or intoxication’.¹⁷ While the fact that many *satis* were *child* widows, rather than adults, was rarely a central theme of colonial critiques, invoking this additional factor of age certainly added weight to paternalistic claims that potential *satis* were unable to speak for themselves and needed the authorities to do so on their behalf. The resulting inquiry into the conditions under which it was, or was not, permissible to prevent *sati* under Hindu law helped to set increasing restrictions on the practice, but despite the claims of the East India Company, this was never a simple gesture designed to benefit the ‘oppressed Hindu woman’.¹⁸

Willingness to overrule Hindu sensibilities relating to *sati*, even after its formal prohibition in 1829, was in fact highly contingent on regional factors and a sense of security about the ability to retain control of British territory in the face of native protests, despite the self-conscious insistence of the Government of India that ‘no apprehension need to be entertained of [abolishing *sati*] exciting violent opposition or any evil consequences whatsoever’.¹⁹ Despite its longstanding popularity among European critics as shorthand for Indian ‘savagery’, colonial officials were well aware that the practice of *sati* was not uniform across the country: some parts of India did not appear to practice it at all, in some regions it was restricted only to certain castes and in others it retained relative popularity.²⁰ Andrea Major has noted that the emphasis on the strength and valour of the ‘martial’ Rajput tribes of north-west India meant that the East India Company was especially leery of provoking hostility from nominally allied princely states by calling for an outright ban, concerns that they had conspicuously not held in relation to imposing their will on Bengal and adjoining north-eastern regions.²¹

Difficulties in enforcing the prohibition on *sati* were also acknowledged, especially given the colonial impression that all Hindus were raised to consider that ‘the act is the most meritorious in the world and of the utmost benefit to the spirit of the enactor and the souls of all her kindred’.²² Since women who were about to commit *sati* were traditionally ascribed magical powers to both see the future and curse their enemies, this belief was widely

held to have a negative impact on the willingness of Hindu families to forcibly prevent women burning themselves. Even if a woman was physically restrained or imprisoned during her husband's cremation, once released, there was no means of stopping the most determined of the would-be *satis* leaving for a neighbouring princely state outside the boundaries of British rule and carrying out the act there, holding their spouse's turban in place of their body.²³ All that could be done, it was suggested in 1843, was for colonial officials to publicise the ban widely, stress the 'inhumanity' of *sati* among the Hindu community, and hand down stern but 'fair' punishment towards those who failed to prevent a self-immolation in ways that would not be seen as offending local sensibilities.²⁴ Well after it was banned in British territories, *sati* remained a popular subject for writers drawing on the trope of oppressed Hindu womanhood: the anonymous (male) author of *The Suttee. A Poem, With Notes* (1846) used this imagery to urge British women to take a more active role in missionary work, claiming that, without their intervention, Indian women would remain both metaphorically and literally enslaved by the dictates of their society and religion.²⁵

Concerns about the fate of a Hindu woman or girl if her husband predeceased her, however, relied on her having already survived infancy. From the late eighteenth century onwards, female infanticide in the subcontinent was identified as a widespread crime that demanded special attention from the colonial authorities.²⁶ British writers concurred that in certain tribes, especially those based in the north-west of India, 'the custom of female child-murder has long been, and still continues very prevalent'.²⁷ Unlike either *sati* or thuggee, the killing of daughters represented a paradox for colonial critics, as it was not possible to ascribe it to religious precepts. Indeed, as Major Alexander Walker recorded in his influential 1808 report on this subject, 'The forms and maxims, and all the Religious tenets of the Hindus, are strongly opposed to the crime of Infanticide'.²⁸ Yet, despite the consensus that female infanticide was strictly abjured, rather than condoned, in Hindu theology, British commentators repeatedly singled out the crime throughout the nineteenth century as inexorably bound up with Hinduism.²⁹ This was directly linked, in their view, to the perceived inferior status of women in the tenets of the faith, which they argued combined with caste and tribal strictures to pernicious effect. Since it was essential for all Hindu girls to marry, the birth of a daughter represented an inevitable expenditure in the form of a dowry, the cost of which became steadily more expensive the higher-ranking the family was, and could potentially reach vast sums.³⁰ The father of a bride, in contrast to the father of a groom, was also faced with a significant loss of station in comparison with the respect gained by his new son-in-law.³¹ For those tribes considered members of the 'martial races' such as the Rajputs, commentators agreed that the same emphasis on honour and status as in cases of *sati* meant that such tribal groups frequently resorted to female infanticide rather than face either economic ruin from dowry costs or damage to familial

reputation and position.

What proved especially disturbing for the British, however, was that in the case of female infanticide, Hindu women were not only the victims in need of rescue from 'savage' male relatives by 'benevolent' imperialists, but also the perpetrators of violence. Major Walker reported that, while the men he interviewed about female infanticide in the early nineteenth century were willing to admit to the practice, 'They usually replied, that it was an affair of the Women, it belonged to the Nursery, and made no part of the business of the Men'.³² If it was decided to kill the child, the act itself might well be performed by the mother, either by smearing poison such as datura juice on her breasts before suckling, or by placing the infant in a hole in the ground that was then filled with milk.³³ In some instances, a midwife or female servant might perform the task instead.³⁴ As Veena Oldenburg has explained, a number of different potential factors impacted on the decision as to whether or not a baby girl would be nurtured or killed, including how many children were in the family already and their access to material resources.³⁵

To accept that the women of the family might be active participants in these decisions, however, would have been profoundly disruptive to the colonial perception of Hindu femininity as inherently vulnerable and voiceless. British commentators on infanticide thus sought alternative theories which could be comfortably framed within their understanding of Hindu women as powerless and in need of 'saving', whether in a physical or spiritual sense. Generally, these ideas involved the women in question being overruled by their husbands with greater or lesser subtlety: they might be seen to 'imbibe the superstition of their husbands' and thus seem in favour of the custom themselves, or merely be too cowed to resist his demands.³⁶ Even in those exceedingly rare instances in which a woman came from a tribe associated with female infanticide and was actually convicted of homicide, the authorities looked for alternative answers as to why the crime had been committed that would not challenge these preconceptions, sometimes disregarding the direct testimony of those involved.

In 1854, Bhaee Mathee confessed at the Kattewar Criminal Court to the charge of infanticide. Mathee testified that her three-year-old daughter was suffering from smallpox when she was confined with twin girls. Since she had been unable to care for all three infants, she chose to let the babies die rather than risk the life of her other child. Despite emphasising that this had been her own decision, both the Indian Assessors and the British agent who participated in the trial were convinced that the crime was 'in obedience to her husband, who they consider to have been the greater culprit', and sentenced her to just a single year's imprisonment.³⁷ By instead blaming Hindu men exclusively for female infanticide, even undeniably guilty Hindu women like Mathee could continue to be used as symbols of the need for colonial intervention and ultimately, the broader imperial project. Linking female

infanticide to *sati*, British commentators argued that these – along with other issues such as slavery – were inextricably linked to the negative state of womanhood which was propounded by Hinduism and enforced by Indian men. Only by tackling the problem at the root and instituting sweeping social reforms, chief among them giving missionaries better financial and political support (including free rein to proselytise), could these problems be solved.³⁸

‘Execrable pride and selfishness’: Hindu masculinity and violence

The idea that the Hindu religion led inexorably to profound moral corruption in its worshippers was repeatedly put forward during the nineteenth century in a variety of forums, including Parliamentary papers, missionary tracts, and the press. To British critics, such corruption started in infancy, when children were taught the most basic elements of the faith, and the pernicious messages continued to be reinforced at regular intervals during adult life through both everyday references to the will of the gods and participation in the vibrant and popular festivals which punctuated the Hindu ritual year. As one author asserted in 1858:

The absurdities involved in the mythologies of the gods, and the cruel or disgusting rites observed in their worship, have fostered the most grovelling conceptions of duty; and by familiarizing their worshippers with debauchery in every form, have stamped the Hindoo character with meanness, cruelty, and lust.³⁹

To an extent, such damaging precepts were held to transcend gender: men and women alike were believed vulnerable to the temptations Hinduism offered, primarily in the supposed equation of devotion with the pursuit of sensuality and excess. When the influential missionary William Ward claimed in 1811 that ‘Whole pages might be written on this painful subject, till the reader was perfectly nauseated with the picture of their vices’, in branding the vast majority of Bengali Hindus as inherently greedy and dishonest, he did not bother to distinguish between the conduct or expectations of male and female worshippers.⁴⁰ In practice, however, given the customary seclusion of upper-class Hindu women in the *zenana* (‘women’s quarters’), it was generally assumed that Hindu men would have far greater opportunities to pursue these desires. For high-caste men, it was believed that the benefits accorded to their station allowed pride and selfishness to become overriding attributes in their character. In some regions, such as Bengal, this was held to fundamentally undermine men’s ‘natural’ masculine traits and lead to physical and mental weakness. For members of the ‘martial races’ such as the Rajputs, it was this ‘execrable pride and selfishness’ that ultimately led to the perpetuation of female infanticide and *sati*, since men were unwilling or unable to risk their reputations being damaged by the need to accept sons-in-law of ‘lesser’

families.⁴¹ An investigation into female infanticide at Benares during the 1850s dismissed outright the popular colonial idea that the fear of making expensive dowry payments in later life provided upper-caste Hindus with any motive for the murder of their daughters. Instead, it was argued, ‘excessive pride’ coupled with local tradition was the root cause.⁴² Regardless of whether they were perceived as effete or barbarous, however, all Hindu men were held collectively responsible for creating the less lethal aspects of the ‘degraded Hindu woman’ trope that was such a repeated theme of western writing about India.

It was also suggested that, in some circumstances, men might use piety and the importance of custom in Hindu society as opportunities to commit unrelated crimes. An 1833 investigation into the group *sati* that occurred in the princely state of Idar following the death of the rajah raised grave concerns that several of the fourteen women who had immolated themselves had been coerced into carrying this out owing to the greed of male court officials, rather than from any devout adherence to Hindu custom.⁴³ The agent sent to make inquiries wrote urgently to the Political Commissioner of Gujarat shortly after his arrival warning that only the *sati* of the oldest rani could definitely be ascribed to religious motives. This woman had apparently made an acerbic denunciation of the court shortly before the ceremony took place, claiming that not only had nobody attempted to talk her out of performing *sati*, but that several other wives, concubines and slaves had then been pressured to join her (including one rani who was ‘several months advanced in pregnancy’) with the intention being that the late ruler's advisers could ‘live on the plunder they were securing to themselves by the destruction of their Chief's whole family’.⁴⁴ For the Government of Bombay, these suspicions were sufficient to not only launch a formal investigation into the circumstances of the case, but also to justify making explicit and authoritative demands to interfere in the management of the state as a whole henceforth, despite the fact it was theoretically independent of British control.⁴⁵ While the court officials who had either encouraged or coerced the *sati* at Idar were presented as motivated by greed rather than religious ardour, the fact remained that a Hindu ceremony had provided these men with the perfect opportunity to steal the jewels and money of the royal family, especially since the succeeding rajah was still in his infancy. Implicitly, too, the story of scheming viziers – a familiar trope to western audiences in many forms, not least through the ever-popular versions of the *Arabian Nights* – tallied not only with longstanding colonial perceptions of ‘Oriental despotism’, but with the specific emphasis on the tendency for Hinduism to condone, or even encourage, the indulgence of a believer's basest urges, especially with regard to the pursuit of wealth and luxury.⁴⁶

Arguably, however, it was in the discussion of *thagi* that the colonial perception of Hindu men as violent barbarians reached its zenith. The

overwhelming majority of those affiliated with the thugs were male. Much emphasis was placed in both colonial and Indian narratives on the idea of thugs as belonging to distinct kinship groups, and it being a hereditary occupation where marriage negotiations were exclusively conducted with other known 'thuggee lineages' who had proved themselves adept killers and thieves (itself reinforcing the colonial preoccupation with the idea of 'criminal tribes').⁴⁷ Yet families were kept as far as possible from the scenes of the crimes until it was time for a young man to join his relatives in the trade. According to one approver, 'We never strangle a Traveller in presence of our women or children, because they would become alarmed and so they are either sent on or remain behind'.⁴⁸ The 'alarmed' here is ambiguous; it is not immediately clear from this deposition whether the aim was to prevent distressing the family of the thug, to avoid warning the victim, or some combination of the two. William Sleeman, the army officer in charge of anti-thuggee operations in India during the 1830s and 1840s, stated he had only ever heard reports of one woman, herself married to a chief thug, who took an active role in its operations.⁴⁹ Uniquely in depictions of those crimes singled out by colonial commentators as 'Indian' offences, however, it was also men who were the intended victims. To harm women or girls was strictly forbidden according to the rules set out by the patron goddess of the thugs.⁵⁰ If this prohibition was ignored (and most thugs interviewed agreed there were occasions they knew of personally when it had been), the consequences for the offenders or those who associated with them were potentially dire.⁵¹ The wrath of the goddess was promptly visited on those who had broken her strictures about the proper selection of victims, likely by bringing about their capture and possibly execution at the hands of the authorities.⁵² This danger of incurring divine anger was not a prospect taken lightly, since rituals and fortune-telling were held to be essential parts of every thug's daily life: the goddess would be worshipped 'by burning ghee, sugar, frankincense' and omens would be carefully studied before setting out.⁵³ If the signs were unfavourable, the mission would be postponed indefinitely until the omens indicated a better outcome.

Interestingly, Kim Wagner has pointed out that prior to Sleeman's appointment, the place of religion in representations of thuggee was minimal: only a single reference was made in official records to the idea of it as a Hindu cult in its own right, rather than a more generic gang of thieves and killers, before this time.⁵⁴ Indeed, the question of exactly *which* Hindu goddess they actually followed was also potentially up for debate. Individual thugs might claim to propitiate 'the Goddess Deveen, Durga, Kalee or Bhawanee, as she is indifferently called'.⁵⁵ The general consensus, however, was that the thuggee cult was ultimately devoted to Kālī, regardless of which name she was called by: William Ward's *Account of the Hindus* had allocated no less than ten pages of his four-volume work to discussions of the belief that human sacrifices were regularly offered up in her honour, especially (but not

exclusively) by professional thieves.⁵⁶ Claims that *thagi* had been directly founded in ancient times by a goddess had their roots in the text of the *Devī-māhātmya*, drawing on the more established tale of Kālī fighting a demon who could transform every drop of blood shed by her weapons into another monstrous foe.⁵⁷ According to the variant passed down in the thuggee tradition, the goddess won her fight by summoning two men (Sleeman's version of this myth went further and had her actually creating the men from her sweat, stressing an even closer religious link) and commanding them to strangle the demons, vanquishing them without further bloodshed.⁵⁸ As a reward, they were to be graced with her eternal favour, and 'that thenceforth they and their descendants might carry on a profitable trade by exercising the destroying implements upon the human race'.⁵⁹ Skilled and experienced, the most proficient thieves were reportedly able 'to remove the bed-clothes from under a sleeper, without having been detected'.⁶⁰ For colonial critics, this story of the origins of thuggee was not only 'preposterous even for an Oriental tradition' but the claim that murder and robbery of travellers might be divinely sanctioned struck at the heart of everything that was wrong with Hinduism, and its supposed propensity to excuse the very worst aspects of humanity.⁶¹

Perhaps most alarming of all, thuggee could seemingly 'infect' those men who actually belonged to a different religion altogether, bringing not only Hindus under the sway of the cult, but a substantial proportion of Muslims as well. Interestingly, no Indian Christian (not even members of Syriac or Catholic congregations, who were hardly viewed with enthusiasm by Protestant East India Company officials and with still less warmth by British missionaries) was ever identified as a thug in the light of this apparent power to enthrall those of other faiths. This absence is particularly noteworthy since the willingness of many Europeans in the early nineteenth century to treat attendance at Hindu festivals or ceremonies as a form of exotic theatre was condemned as liable to lead to confusion about Christian religious ideas among the majority of Indians. William Sleeman argued that this practice, while springing from 'innocent' motives, had created 'a notion that in Calcutta even the Christians attend her [Kālī's] worship, and make offerings to her temple'.⁶² Presumably with regard to the absence of 'native Christians' from *thagi*, it was felt that any of those Indians who had taken Jesus as their saviour were then protected by their adherence to the 'true faith' from slipping back into any form of 'idolatry', and making a decision to join such a specific and murderous group, let alone being accepted into their ranks, would have been rather more than just a 'slip'! Muslims, however, were believed to have no such divine protection against being inveigled into participation in *thagi*: 'The superstitions of the Thugs are all of Hindoo origin: yet Mahometans adopt them with a belief equally implicit, and a devotion equally ardent'.⁶³ Even the fictional antihero of Philip Meadows Taylor's bestselling novel *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) was represented in the text as a Muslim, rather

than a Hindu.⁶⁴ It was not uncommon for arrested thugs who turned approver in the hope of judicial leniency to describe themselves in their confession as being ‘Mussulman by caste...and [I] have always been a Thug by birth and Inheritance’.⁶⁵ Muslim thugs might disagree when interviewed by colonial officials about the extent to which they were truly engaged in the worship of Kālī – informants might excuse this syncretic worship in different ways, including an occasional claim that it was really the *Hindu* members of the cult who were mistaken in their theology, and that it was Fatima (daughter of the Prophet), not Kālī, who was its divinely-appointed patron – there was no doubt that they existed among the ranks of the group.⁶⁶ Tellingly, however, this fact did little or nothing to dispel the overwhelming association of thuggee with Hinduism. Whether Muslims were involved in fictional or factual accounts, it retained its association with ‘naturally’ Hindu qualities.

Conclusions

As early as mid-century, claims began to be made with increasing frequency that the practices of *sati*, *thagi* and female infanticide which were held to exemplify the physical as well as spiritual dangers of Hinduism had now been successfully eliminated under British rule.⁶⁷ In 1852, William Buyers delivered a withering assessment of British commentators on these issues who, seemingly unaware of how much had changed in India since the early nineteenth century, wasted energy complaining vociferously about ‘evils that have ceased to exist’.⁶⁸ One article in the London newspaper *John Bull* observed that even if the colonial administration was hardly immune to criticism less than a year after the Great Rebellion, ‘the Company can boast that they have suppressed thuggee, piracy and suttee, that they have abated dacoitee and infanticide, and abolished slavery’.⁶⁹ While these assertions were repeatedly made throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the killings identified as ‘Hindu problems’ which so fascinated and terrified colonial commentators have not vanished from twenty-first-century India.⁷⁰ Most significantly, the ongoing prevalence of female infanticide (and its post-1970s counterpart, sex-specific foeticide), including the worrying spread of this practice to south Indian states such as Tamil Nadu where these incidents were previously considered to be rare, means that the issue continues to attract substantial attention both within and outside the nation.⁷¹ While the most high-profile example of *sati* in contemporary India remains the 1987 case of Roop Kanwar, it is telling that the repercussions of this event (still much debated as to whether it was voluntary, coerced or even accidental) continue to reverberate, and that all eleven defendants accused of ‘glorifying’ *sati* in the wake of Kanwar's death were finally acquitted in 2004.⁷² Even acknowledging the point that thuggee does not have such a direct contemporary parallel as the other two issues discussed in this article, the closely related subjects of gang violence and organised crime, unsurprisingly,

also remain issues in India, as they do elsewhere.

For nineteenth-century commentators, these subjects, and – just as important – later claims that they had been successfully abolished were touchstones, a way of tapping into a broader set of cultural discourses about gender, ‘race’ and class both at home and in the British Empire. Rhetorical framing of Hindu gender roles as a binary opposition between vulnerable, silent women and barbarous, proud men, along with the construction of Hinduism as potentially lethal, served to legitimise the imperial project. Although such discourses were never just passively accepted by colonial subjects, these ideas could be drawn on to shore up both conservative and radical claims about the ‘true nature’ of Indian culture and society.⁷³ Returning to examine a period when *sati*, thuggee and female infanticide were considered by the colonial state to be inherently ‘Hindu problems’, regrettable but inevitable consequences in a society with a majority Hindu population, can help tease apart the closely-wedded subjects of ‘religion’ and ‘custom’, and to shed new light on the assumptions made about what constitute ‘traditional values’ in both Britain and India.

Notes

The research for this article was made possible by a grant from the John Fell OUP Fund. I am also very grateful to Esme Cleall, Joanna de Groot, Sue Morgan and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestions and comments on how best to improve this paper.

- 1 On *sati* see: Nancy Gardner Cassels, *Social Legislation of the East India Company: Public Justice versus Public Instruction* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), pp. 88–111; Ania Loomba, ‘Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings on Widow Immolation in India’, *History Workshop Journal* 36 (1993), pp. 209–27; Andrea Major, *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati, 1500–1830* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Andrea Major, *Sovereignty and Social Reform in India: British Colonialism and the Campaign Against Sati, 1830–60* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790–1865* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 65–91; Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women Press, 1996), pp. 53–9; Catherine Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Anand A. Yang, ‘Whose *Sati*?: Widow Burning in Early 19th Century India’, *Journal of Women's History* 1 (1989), pp. 8–33. On thuggee see: Clare Anderson, *Legible Bodies: Race, Criminality and*

Colonialism in South Asia (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 4–6, 24–30; Mark Brown, ‘Crime, Governance and the Company Raj: The Discovery of Thuggee’, *British Journal of Criminology* 42 (2002), pp. 77–95; Cassels, *Social Legislation*, pp. 28–70; Tom Lloyd, ‘Thuggee, Marginality and the State Effect in Colonial India, circa 1770–1840’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 45 (2008), pp. 201–37; Alexander L. Macfie, ‘Thuggee: An Orientalist Construction?’, *Rethinking History* 12 (2008), pp. 383–97; Radhika Singha, ‘“Providential” Circumstances: The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation’, *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1993), pp. 83–146; Martine van Woerkens, *The Strangled Traveller: Colonial imaginings and the Thugs of India*, tr. Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Kim A. Wagner, *Thuggee* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). On infanticide, see: Rashmi Dube Bhatnagar, Renu Dube and Reena Dube, *Female Infanticide in India: A Feminist Cultural History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Cassels, *Social Legislation*, pp. 112–55; Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 102–36; Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 49–61; Pashmina Murthy, ‘Archiving the Absence: Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century British India’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern California, 2007); Nair, *Women and Law*, pp. 84–9; Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 41–72; Lalita Panigrahi, *British Social Policy and Female Infanticide in India* (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal, 1972); Satadru Sen, ‘The Savage Family: Colonialism and Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century India’, *Journal of Women's History* 14 (2002), pp. 53–79.

- 2 Maria Misra, *Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India since the Great Rebellion* (London: Penguin, 2007). For continuities and changes in relation to criminal justice, see Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 3 Daniel J. R. Grey, ‘Gender, Religion and Infanticide in Colonial India, 1870–1906’, *Victorian Review* 37 (2011), pp. 107–20.
- 4 Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 52.
- 5 Nancy Gardner Cassels is a notable exception. However, her focus is on passage of laws and she is explicitly suspicious of the political dimensions to postcolonial scholarship: see Cassels, *Social Legislation*. Janaki Nair has

- touched on *sati* and female infanticide in her work on women and colonial law, but for the reasons I have given above, *thagi* is not discussed. See Nair, *Women and Law*.
- 6 Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Otherness in the British Empire, c.1840–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 120.
 - 7 Pompa Bannerjee, *Burning Women: Widows, Witches and Early Modern European Travellers in India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Major, *Pious Flames*.
 - 8 On the broader implications of the view of the British as successors to the Mughals, see Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 100–40.
 - 9 Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or, Ordinations of the Pundits, from a Persian Translation, made from the Original, written in the Shanscrit Language* (London: n.p., 1776), p. xi.
 - 10 Nandini Bhattacharya-Panda, *Appropriation and Invention of Tradition: The East India Company and Hindu Law in Early Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 89–136.
 - 11 Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, p. 124.
 - 12 George Costard, *A Letter to Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, Esquire. Containing Some Remarks on his Preface To the Code of Gentoo Laws Lately Published* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1781), p. 16.
 - 13 Nandini Bhattacharya-Panda, ‘Women in the Śāstric Tradition: Colonialism, Law, and Violence’, in Andrew R. Murphy (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 389–405.
 - 14 Halhed, *A Code*, p. 283.
 - 15 Halhed, *A Code*, p. 286.
 - 16 See e.g., William Ward, *Account of the Writings, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos*, 4 vols (Serampore: Mission Press, 1811), vol. 2, pp. 544–66.
 - 17 West Bengal State Archives Judicial Criminal Proceedings, Kolkata (WBSA JCP), 7 February 1805, no. 6. Letter from J. R. Elphinstone to George Dardeswell, 4 January 1805.
 - 18 See variously WBSA JCP, 4 October 1814, nos. 6–16 in this series; Mani, *Contentious Traditions*; Major, *Pious Flames*.

- 19 'Hindoo Widows. (Practice Of Suttee.) Return to an Order of the Honourable House of Commons, dated 4th June 1830', *Parliamentary Papers (PP)*, 1830, no. 550, vol. 28, p. 1062.
- 20 'Papers relating to East India affairs: viz. Hindoo widows, and voluntary immolations', *PP*, 1821, no. 749, vol. 18, p. 322.
- 21 Major, *Sovereignty and Social Reform*.
- 22 National Archives of India, New Delhi, Foreign Political Consultations (NAI FPC), 10 February 1844, no. 175. Letter from Captain J. Abbott to Lt. Col. C. M. Wade, 6 September 1843.
- 23 NAI FPC, 10 February 1844, no. 177. Letter from Captain J. Abbott to Lt. Col. C. M. Wade, 18 October 1843.
- 24 NAI FPC, 10 February 1844, no. 178. Letter from Lt. Col. C. M. Wade to Captain J. Abbott, 27 November 1843.
- 25 Anon., *The Suttee. A Poem, With Notes* (London: Seeley, Burnside & Seeley, 1846), pp. 20–21.
- 26 'East India Affairs. Copy of all Correspondence which has taken place on the subject of Hindoo Infanticide, and of all Proceedings of the Indian Government, with regard to that Practice; 1789–1820', *PP*, 1824, no. 426, vol. 23, pp. 167–311.
- 27 Edward Moor, *Hindu Infanticide. An Account of the Measures Adopted for the Suppressing the Practice of the Systematic Murder by Their Parents of Female Infants; with Incidental Remarks on Other Customs Peculiar to the Natives of India* (London: J. Johnson and Co, 1811), p. 4.
- 28 British Library India Office Records (BL IOR), P/382/42. Bombay Political Proceedings, 31 March 1808. See report of Major Alexander Walker into attempts to suppress female infanticide at Baroda, 15 March 1808, paragraph 4.
- 29 Revd John Cormack, *Account of the Abolition of Female Infanticide in Guzerat, with Considerations on the Question of Promoting the Gospel in India* (London: Black, Parry and Co., 1815), p. 51; John Wilson, *History of the Suppression of Infanticide in Western India* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1855), pp. 10, 29–31.
- 30 John Cave Browne, *Indian Infanticide, Its Origin, Progress and Suppression* (London: W. H. Allen, 1857), pp. 12–13.
- 31 W. R. Moore, *Report on Female Infanticide* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1859), p. 38.

- 32 BL IOR, P/382/42. Report of Major Walker, paragraph 65.
- 33 Cave Browne, *Indian Infanticide*, p. 6.
- 34 Moor, *Hindu Infanticide*, p. 55; Moore, *Report*, pp. 46–7.
- 35 Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder*, p. 172.
- 36 J. Peggs, *India's Cries to British Humanity, Relative to the Suttee, Infanticide, British Connexion with Idolatry, Ghaut Murders and Slavery in India, to which is added Humane Hints for the Melioration of State of Society in British India* (2nd edn, London: Seeley and Son, 1830), p. 140. First published c.1826 as two separate pamphlets, no longer extant.
- 37 *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, 23 August 1854, p. 4091.
- 38 Moor, *Hindu Infanticide*; Cormack, *Account of the Abolition of Female Infanticide*; Peggs, *India's Cries to British Humanity*.
- 39 George Gould, *India: Its History, Religion and Government* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1858), p. 10.
- 40 Ward, *Account of the Writings, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos*, vol. 1, pp. xx–xxi.
- 41 Wilson, *History*, p. 430.
- 42 Moore, *Report*, p. 38.
- 43 Andrea Major, 'Self-determined Sacrifices? Victimhood and Volition in British Constructions of *Sati* in the Rajput States, 1830–60', *History and Anthropology* 17 (2006), pp. 313–26.
- 44 NAI FPC, 31 October 1833, no. 14. Letter from J. Eskine to James Williams, 26 August 1833.
- 45 NAI FPC, 31 October 1833, no. 14. Letter from James Williams to John Bay, 2 September 1833; and response 26 September 1833.
- 46 On the *Arabian Nights*, see Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011).
- 47 See Preeti Nijhar, *Law and Imperialism: Criminality and Constitution in Colonial India and Victorian England* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009).
- 48 National Archives of India, Home Department Thagi & Daikiti (NAI T & D), D. 2 (3). Deposition of Giddah Bhagnath, 27 October & 3rd November 1837.
- 49 W. H. Sleeman, *Ramaseeana, or A Vocabulary of the Peculiar Language*

Used by the Thugs, with an Introduction and Appendix Descriptive of the System Pursued by that Fraternity and of the Measures which have been adopted by the Supreme Government of India for its Suppression (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1836), pp. 79–80.

- 50 Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, p. 8; Edward Thornton, *Illustrations of the History and Practices of the Thugs. And Notices of some of the Proceedings of the Government of India, for the Suppression of the Crime of Thuggee* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1837), pp. 26–7.
- 51 Thornton, *Illustrations*, pp. 27–30.
- 52 Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, p. 8.
- 53 NAI T & D, D. 2 (3). Deposition of Giddah Bhagnath, 27 October and 3rd November 1837.
- 54 Wagner, *Thuggee*, p. 137.
- 55 Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, p. 7.
- 56 Ward, *Account of the Writings, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos*, vol. 3, pp. 174–84.
- 57 Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-māhātmya and a Study of its Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).
- 58 Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*, pp. 127–8.
- 59 John W. Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company; A History of Indian Progress* (2nd edn, London: Richard Bentley, 1853), p. 357.
- 60 John Capper, *The Three Presidencies of India: A History of the Rise and Progress of the British Indian Possessions* (London: Ingram, Cooke, & Co., 1853), p. 422.
- 61 Kaye, *Administration*, p. 357.
- 62 Sleeman, *Ramaseeana*. See extensive footnote on p. 77.
- 63 Thornton, *Illustrations*, p. 70.
- 64 Philip Meadows Taylor, *Confessions of a Thug* (London: Richard Bentley, 1839).
- 65 NAI T & D, D. 2 (3). Deposition of Sheikh Hussan alias Hussan Khan, 14 April 1836.
- 66 Thornton, *Illustrations*, pp. 70–74. See also discussion in Wagner, *Thuggee*, pp. 140–42.

- 67 See e.g., Gould, *India*, pp. 14–15, 74–6; Joseph Mullens, *A Brief Review of Ten Years' Missionary Labour in India between 1852 and 1861* (London: James Nisbet and Co, 1863), p. 3; 'Our Indian Empire', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 80, December 1856, pp. 646–51.
- 68 William Buyers, *Travels in India: Comprising sketches of Madras, Calcutta, Benares and the principal places on the Ganges, also of the Church of England, Baptist, London Society and other missionary stations: with observations on the origin, customs and worship of the Hindoos, and narratives of incident and adventure, &c.* (London: Blackwood, 1852), p. 235.
- 69 *John Bull*, 6 February 1858, p. 89.
- 70 Suggestions were often made in newspaper articles about these 'civilising benefits' of colonial rule in India: see *Belfast News-Letter*, 26 May 1870, p. 4; *Times*, 13 November 1885, p. 13.
- 71 Supinder Kaur, *Female Foeticide: A Frightful Reality (Socio-Legal Ramifications)* (Allahabad: Central Law Publications, 2009); Ramasamy Muthulakshmi, *Female Infanticide: Its Causes and Solutions* (New Delhi: Discovery, 1997); Shahid Perwez, 'Female Infanticide and the Civilizing Mission in Postcolonial India: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu c.1980–2006', in Carey A. Watt and Michael Mann (eds), *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development* (London: Anthem, 2011), pp. 243–70.
- 72 'All accused in Roop Kanwar case acquitted', *Times of India*, 31 December 2004, <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2004-01-31/india/28346256_1_roop-kanwar-ram-singh-manohar-special-court>, accessed 4 April 2012; Paul B. Courtright and Namita Goswami, 'Who was Roop Kanwar? *Sati*, Law, Religion, and Postcolonial Feminism', in Gerald James Larson (ed.), *Religion and Personal Law in Secular India: A Call to Judgment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 200–25.
- 73 Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

PART II

Religion, Embodiment and Subjectivity

Engendering Purity and Impurity in Assyriological Studies: A Historiographical Overview

Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura

In this chapter, we intend to reflect upon the role that scholars play in the reconstruction of historical issues and on how much bias can be detected in those reconstructions. More specifically, and at the point where religion and gender intersect, we explore the way in which the concepts of 'purity' and 'impurity' have been used in Assyriological studies to advance certain discourses on body issues in relation to women. Although the terms 'purity' and 'impurity' are recurrent in Assyriological studies and textual translations, few extensive lexicographical and historical works have been devoted to the topic. Textual editions and research pieces that take ancient Mesopotamia as an object of study tend to translate a number of words (see the 'Terminology' below) in terms of purity/impurity, taking them as self-evident in meaning. Cultural translation of such concepts, however, poses a serious set of problems affecting not only translation but, more importantly, understanding of ancient practices. In fact, in the specific examples presented here, gender constitutes a key element in the construction of certain modern scholarly interpretations of purity and impurity in relation to women's bodies.

It would be impossible to summarise here all the problems of translation and interpretation that cuneiform texts present. Three millennia of written evidence in a variety of languages (with a predominance of Sumerian and Akkadian) that were used not only in Mesopotamia but also in surrounding areas, have given shape to an irregular body of evidence that often obliges the scholar to use texts from different areas, genres and chronological periods in order to make sense of it all.¹ This premise made clear, and being well aware of the problems of cultural translation of both abstract concepts and social and religious attitudes, we have approached the question by focusing on a particular case-study that illustrates our point. Through the specific analysis of a Mari letter (18th century BCE), and further complementary examples taken from the Ur III texts (22nd–21st centuries BCE), we reflect upon the question of how women have been regarded as possible causes of impurity in ancient Mesopotamia, and through what devices this cultural construction has been formulated and argued for in Assyriological studies.

Starting point: feminist epistemologies as a theoretical framework

In order to shed light on how the purity/impurity theme has been dealt with in Assyriology, we adopt a feminist epistemology and apply feminist methodological approaches to the study of cuneiform texts, specifically so-called 'standpoint epistemologies' and theories of 'situated knowledge'.² Neither of these is based on relativism but on a multi-focused approach to 'objectivity'.³ Social scientific methods, traditionally regarded as the paradigm of objectivity, are of particular interest to us. This approach raises the question of the *choice* of topics of study, and not only of the study itself, suggesting that the act of selecting a specific research topic (which, after all, is the first step in the production of knowledge) may both reflect a particular agenda and condition the study's results. Certain topics are labelled as women's topics, such as child bearing, while others such as war and military campaigns, described as being of more general interest, are usually associated with masculinity and tend to be given greater significance in academic discourses. Thus, the conditioning of researchers prioritises certain issues while rejecting others.⁴ This becomes clear when dealing with purity/impurity issues, especially analysed in terms of their application to men or women. On the specific case of Assyriology, Diane Bolger has recently published some challenging data about the main research topics covered by scholars, focusing on who (whether men or women) has published on what topic and in what format, and how these tendencies have changed over the years. Her data makes it evident that there is a cause and effect relationship between the scholars' sex/gender and their research choices.⁵

Gender studies and Assyriology: a relationship under construction

Assyriological studies applying gender perspectives are scarce, and the isolated efforts made during the last decades have concentrated mainly on women from the feminist viewpoint most applied to archaeology during the 1980s – looking for women in history. This has resulted in mainly single studies with a poor or non-existent theoretical basis, or in good theoretical studies with limited knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian sources. Notable exceptions that have promoted new theoretical frameworks in the engendering process are found in the works of Irene Winter on the construction of the ruler's masculinity through the analysis of the Naram-Sin stele; Julia M. Asher-Greve, on iconography, art history and methodology concerning the application of gender perspectives to Assyriology; and Zainab Bahrani, on trends in gender studies and their application in different Mesopotamian case studies as related to iconography and art.⁶ Scholars more committed to gender perspectives than methodological issues include works by Julia Assante,

Susan Pollock and Claudia Suter.⁷ Those more concerned with methodology include recent studies by Saana Teppo/Saana Svärd.⁸ Finally, Layla Al-Zubaidi, Carolyn Nakamura and Karina Croucher combine suggestively archaeological and philological sources applying elements from post-feminism and queer studies.⁹ Despite the problems posed by cuneiform sources, it remains possible to apply a gender analysis of the sources. As Rivkah Harris has observed in the introduction to her book, the sources themselves are 'male-authored and male-oriented and hence androcentric in perspective'.¹⁰ At this point, then, two androcentric stages are present that need to be examined: the first one is established by the sources themselves; the second one arises from more than a century of Assyriological studies.¹¹

Of course, this entire debate needs to be framed in the larger analytical context regarding the problematisation of research topics and the scholarly production of knowledge.¹² Understanding the way in which particular backgrounds, circumstances and trends influence academic discourse, promoting the organisation and classification of reality in particular ways, and thus producing and reproducing a certain kind of 'loaded' knowledge, is at stake here. In the specific case of purity/impurity, the phrasing for 'impurity', when linked with 'woman' and 'menstruation', triggers a mechanism of knowledge production based in biblical and Christian concepts that contributes to the perpetuation of the dominant patriarchal model. In fact, the specific history of Assyriology as a discipline that derived from the search for confirmation of biblical narratives lies at the basis of many traditional positions adopted in Assyriology.

Virtually no scholarly works currently provide an engendered reading of women's bodies and physiology in Assyriological studies.¹³ Instead, the relationship between menstruation and impurity is assumed by most scholars to be universal and self-evident, through a process that transforms what is a social and cultural category into something biological and natural.¹⁴ This chapter aims at rethinking the parameters of historical evaluation in general, and of women's bodies in particular, by approaching cuneiform sources first-hand, assuming that every discipline has its history, and critically applying a gender analysis so as to avoid the 'just-one-objectivity' discussed above – in other words, the single reading often proposed by patriarchal approaches to philology that applies words and concepts as monolithic unities throughout time and space.

Purity and impurity in Mesopotamia: defining terms

How then, have purity and impurity been defined in Assyriological studies? Two aspects have been emphasised when discussing (im)purity as codified in cuneiform sources: purity understood as observance of etiquette, showing

respect and so on, and impurity as related to pollution or contagion. The widely quoted scholar of the Ancient Near East, Karel van der Toorn, recognises an aesthetic quality in the Mesopotamian concepts referring to these physiological states. He asserts that purity is part of religious etiquette and therefore integrated into the vast field of behavioural propriety including manners and the acceptance of rules of social coexistence.¹⁵ Being presentable when appearing before their god was imperative for men, unless they wanted to anger the deity. In some textual examples concerning ritual performances which van der Toorn quotes, participants must wash themselves and wear adequate or clean (*ebbu*) clothing; lack of observance of this code can cause the *māmītu* or 'curse of the gods'.¹⁶ According to van der Toorn, this explains the existence of certain prohibitions or admonitions on eating certain types of foods before going to the temple, since strong odours were offensive when approaching the gods.¹⁷

The gods are pure and holy and man's purity and holiness depends on the degree of conformity with their standards. What is acceptable in social intercourse may be unacceptable in the presence of the gods, just as one is permitted manners at home which could not be displayed at court.¹⁸

Two recent articles by Walther Sallaberger reiterate most of the theories proposed by van der Toorn.¹⁹ According to Sallaberger, 'purity pertains to the field of everyday physical cleanliness'. This concept was then introduced into the realm of religion to represent the 'invisible impurity' which he equates in a rather unspecific way with the concept of 'miasma' proposed by Mary Douglas.²⁰ Sallaberger argues that 'cultic purity' (applied to the divine) and 'everyday cleanliness' (applied to all the rest) is clearly differentiated terminologically, although this differentiation is less obvious to us than it is to the author. Order, then, is considered a precondition for purity, while alteration of order ends up in impurity.²¹

A recent definition that synthesises how the purity/impurity issue has been dealt with in Assyriological studies, and demonstrates the utter complexity of defining ancient concepts in modern terms, can be found on the 'Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire' project web page:

Purity is not just about physical cleanliness, but has religious, mental, moral, and social implications too. For the Assyrians, ritual purification was an important means of destroying or preventing evil and/or gaining the favour and support of the gods. Conversely, impurity or uncleanness was considered contagious and could potentially jeopardise ritual actions. Thus haruspices asked the gods to disregard accidental impurity during extispicies, exorcists performed rituals to purify their clients' houses as well as their bodies...and the king underwent the *Bīt rimki* ritual to wash away the impurity portended by a solar eclipse.²²

All scholars use the notions and labels 'physical cleanliness', 'etiquette',

‘order’ and ‘good behaviour’ to characterise ancient Mesopotamia conceptualisations of (im)purity. The general assumption of purity as a ‘question of etiquette’ changes dramatically in Assyriological literature, however, when women are introduced into the discussion. In relation to women, the notion of ‘contagion through contact’ is always preponderant. Through the case study presented here, it is possible to see how Assyriological scholars translate and interpret a number of terms and expressions associated with women in this way without exploring the reasons for that ‘impurity state’ or what the channels of contagion and transmission might be. Furthermore, in the following example, there is an additional turn of the methodological screw. Even when no reference to (im)purity-related terminology is employed in the particular text under analysis, the mere presence of an unclear passage in relation to a female (in our case the princess Šibtu) is automatically interpreted, without reservation, as related to female physiology.

Terminology of ‘(im)purity’ in Assyriological studies: an assessment

Generally speaking, all vocabulary that is translated in terms of purity/impurity can be used to refer to shiny and perfectly clean objects and individuals and is employed in texts describing ritual actions or objects used in ritual performances (divination, actions involving the invocation of, and interaction with, the deities, healing techniques and so on) as well as in accounts of the legal status of people or property with the meaning of ‘free’ (see [Table 1](#) below). On the other hand, most terms referring to dirtiness or impurity are constructed through negation of the positive term, thus *la ellu* ‘not clean, not washed’, etc. Other terms, such as *lu’û* – ‘soiled, dirty, unclean, sullied’ – are less common in the cuneiform material.²³

Table 1: Frequent Sumerian and Akkadian terms related to cleanliness

Sumerian	Akkadian	Contextual meanings	References*
kù siki1	<i>ellu</i>	splendorous, clear, clean, pure, sacred (pertaining to the sphere of deities), free, noble	CAD E s.v., pp. 102–6; <i>AHw</i> s.v., pp. 204–5
dadag	<i>ebbu</i>	polished, shining, lustrous, clean, pure (in a cultic sense), sacred, trustworthy, proper; it describes metals and stones, and applies to objects that are manipulated during ritual performance	CAD E s.v., pp. 1–4; <i>AHw</i> s.v., p. 80
ud zálag	<i>namru</i>	metals, celestial bodies, light, lamps, body parts such as teeth, etc	CAD N/I s.v., pp. 239–44; <i>AHw</i> sub <i>nawru</i> , pp. 770–71
	<i>zakû</i>	clear, cleansed, in good order; plain; refined, pure; clean; being legally free; it is said of drinking water, the sky, the sun, clothing	CAD Z s.v., pp. 23–5; <i>AHw</i> s.v. I and II, pp. 1505–7

*In the absence of a complete Sumerian dictionary, we are only providing bibliographic references for the Akkadian terms. However, the interested reader can turn to ePSD (Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary: <http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/epsd/repd-frame.html>) for further details.

Three main points clearly emerge from the contextual uses of these terms within the cuneiform material. First, those Sumerian and Akkadian terms usually translated as ‘to purify’, ‘purity’, ‘pure’ etc. show a broad range of semantic nuances that go beyond the ethical, theological, moral and religious sense implied by modern translations of ‘purity’. Most verbs and nouns are used in the context of washing (the body, clothing), cleaning (objects of different type), or in descriptions of the shining nature of an object’s properties or material. Most terms referring to cleanliness also show the nuance ‘in order, proper’. Second, it is the context rather than the individual or the object *per se* that usually determines when something can be considered ‘impure’, ‘improper’, ‘unacceptable’, or ‘disagreeable’. Third, many of these terms can be, and are, applied both to men and women. However, those peculiar terms that are mainly, although not exclusively applied to women are tendentially interpreted as referring to an alleged impure state.²⁴

Women and bodily products: blood and menstruation

Cuneiform texts then use a rather wide range of terms to refer variously to men and women: both can be ‘clean, pure, well, in order’ or ‘touched, impure, outside the norm’. Nonetheless, whenever a somehow obscure Sumerian or Akkadian term is used to refer to a state or condition suffered by a woman, it will usually be interpreted in terms of impurity and related to bodily functions as well as to the specificity of female physiology. The meaning is also often strained and twisted to make it fit with ideas connecting childbirth and menstruation with ‘ritual impurity’, even when there is insufficient evidence to make such assertions.

An especially problematic feature in this interpretative model concerns the

human body (especially the female body) and its products, which have often been interpreted in Assyriological studies as sources of impurity. Van der Toorn contends that in the Near East, body fluids (semen, blood, menses, fluids secreted by the sexual organs, etc.) are extremely polluting. In his view, the menstruating woman was considered *lu'āt* or 'defiled', and thus capable of transmitting impurity through contact with others.²⁵ Unfortunately, this rather bold assumption does not find clear support in the sources. Data on the social management of menstrual periods, menarche, menopause and vital events of the life cycle in general are far from recognisable in cuneiform sources. In addition, they tend to be excluded from the written discourse since such events pertain to the private sphere and intimate lives of common people. In fact, although most of these assumptions are taken for granted, namely, that menstruation in Mesopotamia was perceived as a source of uncleanness, the truth is that even the terms for 'menstruation' in Sumerian and Akkadian are not at all clear.²⁶

So what do we know about menstruation in ancient Mesopotamia? The sources are scarce on this subject, with most references coming from medical texts. These therapeutic texts usually use the generalising term *Uš₍₂₎*, *Uš₍₂₎.meš / dāmu* or 'blood' to refer to bleeding in different pathological contexts so that, when applied to women's health, it is difficult to ascertain whether regular menses, abnormal vaginal bleeding or other issues are intended. However, the fact that the term *Úš munus* ('woman's blood') often appears in texts on women's diseases makes it clear that the conjunction of bleeding and female pathology is at the core of the therapeutic performance.²⁷ Thus, we have written evidence of different therapeutic measures 'to cut off / stop the blood of a woman', although it is unclear as to whether or not too-frequent or too-long periods, heavy menstruation or other problems related to vaginal bleeding are actually implied.²⁸ Importantly, as far as we have been able to deduce, therapeutic texts on women's diseases and vaginal haemorrhage include no notion of (im)purity in their formulation.²⁹

Another illustrative expression related to menstruation is used to refer not to the female condition but to describe certain symptoms in men that are similar, and therefore associated with, vaginal bleeding. The expression 'as a woman he is struck by a weapon' (*kīma sinništi* ^{GIŠ}TUKUL *mahiš*), for example, is applied to patients who suffer from rectal bleeding or blood in the urine, as in: 'if a man discharges blood through his penis, he is struck by a weapon like a woman' (*BAM* 159 i 9) or 'if a man constantly discharges blood through his anus like a woman (suffering from) *nahšātu*'.³⁰ These expressions, namely 'being struck by a weapon like a woman', have been understood mostly as euphemisms for menstruation by scholars.³¹ Note, however, that the expression is also used in the context of female genito-urinary and rectal diseases, so may refer to a pathological state more than to a physiological process.³² This suggests that the semantic dimension of the term must be

pursued further. In any case, no reference to the 'polluting' or 'impure' nature of blood is specifically made in the primary sources either. Curiously enough, haemorrhage and bleeding are never interpreted in Assyriological studies as a source of uncleanness in contexts where men are involved.

Despite the absence of in-depth analysis and the scarcity of cuneiform sources recording socio-religious ideas on menstruation and bleeding in general, therefore, it is not unusual to find all manner of scholarly assertions on the impure and polluting nature of woman's blood in Mesopotamia. However, some authors claim that impurity because of contact with blood was absent in Mesopotamian thought, and although blood could be used as an expression of guilt (for example blood crimes) it did not carry notions of impurity.³³ Nevertheless, based on ethnological evidence taken from elsewhere, Walther Sallaberger believes that during the period of menstruation, women in Mesopotamia *were* separated from the family or social group.³⁴ Even the most recent studies automatically assert women's menstruation as a source of impurity and the need to depart from the home or family during the menstrual cycle.³⁵ So why is this the case?

Scholarly interpretations are constructed through two mechanisms: the establishment of parallels between the Bible and the cuneiform sources through applying biblical and rabbinic attitudes to women's bodies to the Mesopotamian evidence on the one hand and, on the other, the subsequent reading of certain semantically obscure terms, especially when they are applied to women, in the light of the purity/impurity discourse. As a practical example of how such interpretations are advanced, a section of van der Toorn's reconstruction will suffice. Biblical evidence is taken here as the main reference through which to reconstruct Mesopotamian historical processes which are envisioned as a purity system running in parallel to that shown in Hebrew sources, even when the author is aware of the problems these same sources pose. After stating that bleeding during childbirth made the Israelite woman unclean, forbidding her from contact with anything pertaining to the realms of the sacred and the divine, van der Toorn observes:

The Mesopotamian model runs broadly parallel to the Old Testament data, though uncertainties of terminology and scarcity of information deny us the required precision. The woman in childbed, called the *harištu* or the *urruštu*, the 'soiled', was considered 'impure', just as was the (*m*)*usukkatu*, 'woman under taboo'. R. Labat supposed a thirty-day period of impurity for the new mother, on the basis of a ritual instructing the ritual expert not to see her during that time. *Musukkatu* is a rather general term comprehending the woman in the period after she has given birth, the one who has not yet washed after sexual intercourse, and also the menstruating woman. Her uncleanness was transmitted to the male passer-by who inadvertently touched her.³⁶

It is clear, therefore, from the examples and discussion above that a wilful misreading of sources has been evident in order to reinforce the purity/impurity binary on women.

A case study: (im)pure women in Mari

The ancient city of Mari (modern Tell Hariri) is located on the banks of the Euphrates River, near the border between Iraq and Syria. A great number of cuneiform texts dating from the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century BCE were recovered there, most of them letters.³⁷ The case study we explore here deals with the translation and interpretation of one of these letters (A.2679 = ARM 26, 13) written by Ašqudum, an official in the service of Yarim-Lim, the king of Aleppo.³⁸ It concerns the arrival of Yarim-Lim's daughter Šibtu to Mari, where she is to marry Mari's king Zimri-Lim. This letter was first published in transliteration and translation into French by Jean-Marie Durand (1988).³⁹ Lines 14 to 19 were translated as follows:

Il a dit: “Que les affaires de ma fille (15) soient (donc) déposées dans sa demeure, (16) (mais) que ma fille réside chez son époux (17) et que 5 ou 6 jours (18) elle quitte (le palais) et (19) qu'elle s'occupe de sa demeure”.⁴⁰

The reference to Šibtu leaving the palace for ‘5 or 6 days’ was taken as a puzzling reference by Durand who interpreted it, as if it were obvious from the context, as a clear reference to menstruation. This assumption led him to complete the picture by arguing that separation took place each and every month. According to Durand, then, Šibtu would have been impure during her menstruation, just as women are said to be during their menses according to Leviticus (12: 2–5 and 15: 19–27). From our point of view, Durand's interpretation presents three problems. First, he believes the allusion to the ‘5 or 6 days’ refers to monthly periods although nowhere in the text is that actually mentioned. Second, he supports his hypothesis on the Bible, which is not only a much later text but also a composition responding to other aims. Third, probably due to the biblical influence, he links menstruation with impurity despite neither concept being mentioned in the letter. Despite these three problematic issues, Durand's proposal has been repeatedly cited in academic publications during the last few decades, as shall be seen.

This kind of historical reconstruction around women's bodies has constituted the norm. In 1987, Bertrand Lafont published a short note in *NABU (Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires)* entitled ‘A propos de l'absence cyclique des femmes’. Beginning with a couple of Ur III administrative texts dated around 2000 BCE, he argued that women were absent from work during their menses as they were considered impure.

Pour ce qui est des femmes, le nombre de journées mensuelles d'absence ‘légale’ était donc, quant à lui, d'environ 6 jours, tenant sans doute compte

du cycle menstruel, avec des notions 'd'impureté' qui y étaient liées.⁴¹

To support his interpretation, Lafont turned to both the Mari letter (*ARM* 26, 13) and the aforementioned passage from Leviticus. However, when quoting the relevant passage of the Mari letter, he added, '5 à 6 jours *par mois* qu'elle se retire chez elle' (emphasis added).⁴² The addition of 'par mois' without brackets is highly significant since the term is absent from the Akkadian original. In other words, both Durand (adding it with brackets) and Lafont (adding it without brackets, despite quoting Durand) incorporated the data they needed, namely 'par mois', to support their hypotheses around the idea of impurity despite the absence of any word from the semantic field of 'cleanliness' in the aforementioned texts.

Lafont's assertion also presented another problem when dealing with the Ur III texts. Taking another administrative text (*TEL* 244), he calculated the number of free days each female worker would benefit from with a result of six free days per month per female worker in contrast to the three free days men were said to have according to Miquel Civil.⁴³ So, when trying to explain why women had six free days while men enjoyed only three, Lafont once again attributed menstruation a key role. After a careful reading of Civil's article, however, we realise that Lafont's starting point was not accurate enough. In his study, Civil declares that male workers enjoyed three free days each month, plus three other days in relation to festivals.⁴⁴ This means that the total days intended for working amounted to twenty-four, meaning that male workers just like their female counterparts had six free days each month. In turn, Hartmut Waetzoldt, working with another group of texts, noticed a tendency towards women having more free days when compared with men.⁴⁵ However, this was only a tendency, since he also noted texts where both men and women had two, three, five or six free days each month due to illness and poor health. Even though this group of texts does not actually explain why the workers were on leave, it might be argued that health problems were probably common. In any case, what emerges here is the need to justify why women may have been absent from work: while men are depicted as simple workers in the act of resting, female workers are presented as individuals whose leave is explained by the specific pathological characteristics of their bodies.

Returning to our case study, despite the obvious translation difficulties in both Durand's and Lafont's propositions on the social meaning of menstruation and impurity in cuneiform sources, their works have been repeatedly cited as in the case of Nele Ziegler.⁴⁶ Ziegler, in her study about the so-called 'harem texts' from Mari, uses Durand's and Lafont's arguments to pronounce that 'il semble que les femmes avaient l'habitude de quitter le palais pour la durée de leur règles'.⁴⁷ In addition to the above-mentioned sources (the Mari letter *ARM* 26, 13; the Ur III administrative texts; and the passages from Leviticus), Ziegler also adds letter 59 (M.11343) as further support for her thesis.

Particularly relevant is the following excerpt that she translates as follows:

Maintenant...une servante du roi est (re)devenue pure et elle est (r)entrée dans le palais...[Mon père] m'a dit à propos des femmes qui n'ont pas le droit de sortir.⁴⁸

Not only is there no explicit mention of menstruation in the text quoted by Ziegler, the term translated here as 'pure' (Akkadian *ellu*) also has the meanings 'clean' and 'free', terms which would allow us to interpret this letter in many different ways. Also significant are the additions in brackets for '(re)devenue' and '(r)entrée'. Although Ziegler shows a slightly more cautious approach, her interpretation still points to menstruation as a central element: 'Le texte ne mentionne pas quelle était la nature de cette impureté, mais on peut supposer qu'il est fait allusion à ses règles'.⁴⁹ More recently, Adelina Millet published the so-called 'harem texts' from Chagar Bazar, another Syrian settlement whose documents are partly contemporary with those from Mari. In the general introduction to the edition, Millet writes:

On sait per ailleurs, grâce notamment au corpus de Mari, que les femmes résidant dans le harem et, plus largement, dans le palais, le quittaient au moment de leurs menstrues, pur des raisons d'impureté rituelle.⁵⁰

To support the thesis of women leaving the palace during menses, Millet quotes Ziegler who, in turn, quotes Durand and Lafont.⁵¹ Millet provides no new references for the hypothesis, since the Chagar Bazar texts do not include allusions to either menstruation or purity and impurity, let alone make a clear connection between both.

The most recent citation of the Mari letter (*ARM* 26, 13) as evidence of women having to leave the palace during their menstrual period was published as late as 2011 by Dominique Charpin:

He: 'My daughter's belongings may be placed in her apartment, but she should live with her husband, and leave for 5 or 6 days (a month) to live in her apartment'.⁵²

Again, as we have seen for Durand and Lafont, the addition of 'a month' (this time in brackets) turns up in the translation. This addition shows that for Charpin too the letter deals with menstruation and impurity: 'Clearly the king of Aleppo is alluding here to the problem of the periods of impurity associated with his daughter's menstruation'.⁵³ Not only is menstruation linked to impurity, the entire situation becomes presented as a 'problem' by Charpin.

Only one voice outside of the French Assyriological tradition, that of Wolfgang Heimpel, has proposed a different translation and interpretation of this Mari letter:

He (said), 'The effects of my daughter must be placed in her apartments. My daughter may stay with her husband! And in 5 days, in 6 days, she may

leave, and she may concern herself with her apartments!’⁵⁴

Heimpel, as do we, considers Durand's and his followers' proposed translations as inconceivable, remarking that he could not 'believe that Yarim-Lim would instruct Ašqudum about such a topic, and I assume that the 5 to 6 days refer to the time when his daughter would be allowed to leave Halab, go to Mari, and "concern herself with her new apartments"'.⁵⁵

Indeed, it seems surprising that men as high ranking as kings and palace officials would engage themselves in an exchange of letters concerning such a private female subject. It also appears unlikely that, if the sexual division of spaces was as clear as scholars believe it was when applying the term 'harem', men would have controlled women's menstruation. From our point of view, the overwhelming influence of the Bible and Judaism is responsible for this biased set of historical readings.⁵⁶ Judaism controlled menstruating women and restricted their sexual intercourse with their partners to control and favour pregnancy, thus it might have been the case that Assyriologists have simply tried to identify similar principles in cuneiform texts. This seems to be the argument Jack Sasson proposes when interpreting the same Mari letter with regard to the time when the princess should live with her husband:

only during the 5–6 days (presumably when menstruating); all other time she must spend in her husband's own apartment, presumably to ensure for her a successful pregnancy.⁵⁷

All in all, it is clear that the Mari letter (*ARM* 26, 13) has been the sole evidence quoted by scholars in over twenty years of academic literature in order to assert that in the eighteenth century BCE, Mari women were rendered impure due to menstruation, and that because of this they were required to leave the palace once a month – even when no word for impurity or uncleanness, no explicit mention of women having to leave the palace periodically, and no direct allusion to menstruation are made in the sources! It is our contention, therefore, that it is highly probable that this letter had nothing to do with all these topics.

To conclude: gendered bodies and (im)purity

Stemming from both the Enlightenment and Cartesian dualism, the humanities have traditionally privileged the study of the soul and the intellect while locating the body in a secondary place, considered, as it has been, as something merely material and less valuable. Although this starting point appears neutral, it was actually masculine, white and occidental. For centuries, knowledge has been produced by and for white western men of specific social classes, meaning the exclusion of all others from this knowledge. These 'others' have been considered as objects of study but never producers or consumers of knowledge. Most importantly, this mind-body division

represents a cultural construction that was entirely absent in ancient Mesopotamia.⁵⁸

Women have often been included as objects of study due to their long historical association with the body, yet have struggled to take part in the creation of intellectual thought. It is within this context that feminist theories of embodiment arose which stemmed from the assumption that all bodies are spaces of lived sociohistorical experiences and that knowledge can also be produced as something originating from the body and our corporeality.⁵⁹ Indeed, if we were to consider the (sexed) body as the core and not as the periphery of thought, then we can begin to question who is producing knowledge, through which channels and with what intentions. Only then will it be possible to open new fields of enquiry and take into account fresh points of view.

If we connect the agents who have traditionally produced knowledge, that is to say men (and Assyriology is no exception here) on the one hand, and the group that has been primarily considered as objects of study but not creators of knowledge, that is to say women, then we can begin to understand some of the reasons behind the terminological interpretations and tensions we have presented so far.⁶⁰ The naturalisation of women as bodies and men as producers of knowledge has its roots in two polemic, intertwined dichotomies: men-culture versus women-nature. The specific historical connections between the point at which areas considered as feminine became naturalised, what the scribes had in mind then, and new academic readings, are really difficult to elucidate. With the examples of menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, all of them share a common ground in that they are specifically connected with women's bodies and female physiology, and it is not possible to link them to men's except through metaphor and other figures of speech. Does it mean that all these situations are natural ones? Here we argue that they are not: they are culturally constructed and their naturalisation is all part of this cultural construction strategy.⁶¹ The difficulty lies in grasping the concepts and ideas on menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth that circulated in ancient Mesopotamia, as well as in determining what has been 'added' by modern scholars during the process of textual editing and commentary.

In the eighteenth century CE, the first evidence of pregnancy was defined as something that was neither merely 'natural' nor exclusively linked to biology.⁶² For feminist Marxists, Rousseau's proposition that reproduction be considered like production, that is to say, as work, was an acceptable one: reproduction means the production of new members of the society, so it could be very well included in the production system.⁶³ Bodies, just like artefacts, need to be produced and maintained. The concept of maintenance, in fact, has fuelled the development of theoretical proposals concerning the so-called 'maintenance activities', which include all we need to produce and maintain the members of a group and, consequently, to manage human dependence.⁶⁴

Almost all the above-mentioned proposals are informed by the work of female scholars working with feminist theory. Before the development and implementation of such theories, and even since, male scholars' attempts to define pregnancy and childbirth have led to an increased naturalisation of the discourse, more male-controlled pregnancies and childbirths, or both. Indeed, the growth of twentieth-century gynaecology is the result of such increased male control over traditional female occupations.⁶⁵ When knowledge that was primarily in the hands of women becomes controlled by men, the result is simultaneously an impairment of women's knowledge and an increased control over women.⁶⁶ This is the situation illustrated by our case study: most scholars have related the letter contents to menstruation and have read them in terms of body control. In addition, we have also drawn attention to the error of launching a hypothesis that is then repeatedly quoted in academic literature, in this case mainly within the French school, while adding little or no new evidence. Why has this been the case? Why have texts been interpreted so as to make them fit into such a flawed interpretative framework? We would argue that several different reasons lay behind this situation. First, Assyriology tends to exhibit a deep commitment to objectivity. Many scholars neglect the fact that all translations are interpretations (*traduttore, traditore*). Second, this biased interpretation is sustained by preconceptions linking women to menstruation and impurity. As already noted, texts concerning women tend to be read in close relationship to the body, therefore emphasising the sexual and corporeal dimension of women. Alternatively, research topics associated with men tend not to refer to sex or the body and, as a consequence, are rarely linked to impurity. Only a deeply patriarchal prejudice could lead to a completion of the sequence '5 or 6 days' as 'each month', binding 'each month' automatically to menstruation, and menstruation to impurity. Why don't scholars undertake the same correlation when dealing with men?

Thus, having analysed relevant examples from the cuneiform written sources, we arrive at the preliminary conclusion that the process of construction of specific topics related to women's bodies in terms of masculine control has taken place in two stages. The first would have occurred when texts were written. As Mesopotamia was a male-oriented society, it is clear that some terms, values and concepts were not applied equally to men and women, even though, for the specific case of (im)purity and in the light of the evidence analysed so far, this statement may not be applicable. In general, images seem to support this gender differentiation as well: while feminine genitals are explicitly depicted in many iconographic examples, male pudenda are scarcely represented.⁶⁷ A more detailed contextualised study of relevant iconography, however, may provide a different, more nuanced reading. The second stage of male control occurred as Assyriologists began to study and decipher the cuneiform writing system. Again, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most scholars were men and it is clear that menstruation,

pregnancy, childbirth and nursing were perceived as puzzling and somehow alien experiences for most translators. As a result, it is not surprising that most Sumerian and Akkadian terms translated as ‘impurity’ in scholarly works have been connected with women and, most prominently, to the fluids expelled by exclusively female bodies. Only through a careful analysis of the original written sources and a more critical approach to previous interpretations, therefore, will a more reliable picture of the history of the Ancient Near East become visible.

Notes

Abbreviations follow the usage of the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. A complete list is also available at <http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations_for_assyriology>.

Transliteration follows the Assyriological form (spaced for Sumerian, italicised for Akkadian).

- 1 For an overview on the topics, approaches and main problems of the field, see Jack M. Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Scribner's, 1995). Most recently, see Eleanor Robson and Karen Radner, *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 248–69.
- 2 For standpoint epistemologies, see Sandra Harding, ‘Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is “Strong Objectivity”?’’, in Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 49–82. For situated knowledge, see Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988), pp. 575–99.
- 3 Helen E. Longino, ‘Subjects, Power and Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophies of Science’, in Alcoff and Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies*, pp. 101–20; Fernando J. García Selgas, ‘Feminist Epistemologies for Critical Social Theory: From Standpoint Theory to Situated Knowledge’, in Sandra Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader. Intellectual and Political Controversies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 293–308.
- 4 Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 20–24.
- 5 Diane Bolger, ‘Gendered Fields in Near Eastern Archaeology’, in Diane Bolger, *Gender Through Time in the Ancient Near East* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), pp. 335–59.
- 6 Irene Winter, ‘Sex, Rhetoric, and the Public Monument: The Alluring Body

- of Naram-Sîn of Agade', in Natalie Boymel Kampen, *Sexuality in Ancient Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 11–26; Julia M. Asher-Greve, *Frauen in altsumerischer Zeit* (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1985). Her first monograph was considered a milestone at the time. See also Julia M. Asher-Greve, 'Stepping into the Maelstrom: Women, Gender and Ancient Near Eastern Scholarship', *NIN: Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* 1 (2000), pp. 1–22. Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- 7 Julia Assante, 'Sex, Magic and the Liminal Body in the Erotic Art and Texts of the Old Babylonian Period', in Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (eds), *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), pp. 27–52; Susan Pollock, 'Women in a Men's World: Images of Sumerian Women', in Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey, *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 366–87; Claudia E. Suter, 'Who are the Women in Mesopotamian Art from ca. 2334–1763 BCE?', *KASKAL: Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico* 5 (2008), pp. 1–55, with previous bibliography.
 - 8 The author signed as Saana Teppo until her 2008 article, 'Sacred Marriage and the Devotees of Ištar', and began signing as Saana Svärd from October 2008 with the publication of her MA dissertation. See e.g., her doctoral thesis, Saana Svärd, *Power and Women in the Neo-Assyrian Palaces* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Department of World Cultures, 2012).
 - 9 Layla Al-Zubaidi, 'Tracing Women in Early Sumer', in K. Anne Pyburn, *Ungendering Civilization* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 117–35; Carolyn Nakamura, 'Mastering Matters: Magical Sense and Apotropaic Figurine Worlds of Neo-Assyria', in Lynn Meskell (ed.), *Archaeologies of Materiality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 18–45; Karina Croucher, 'Queering Near Eastern Archaeology', *World Archaeology* 37 (2005), pp. 610–20.
 - 10 Rivkah Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The Gilgamesh Epic and Other Ancient Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), p. viii. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine* (Paris: Liber, 1998).
 - 11 In this regard, it is significant to note that, as Joan Westenholz criticises, most papers presented during the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* of 1986, which was devoted to women in the Ancient Near East, had nothing to do with gender studies. See Joan Westenholz, 'Towards a New Conceptualization of the Female Role in Mesopotamian Society', *Journal*

- 12 Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Les Oeuvres de Michel Foucault, 1969).
- 13 The work of Marten Stol, however useful it may be, does not show any inclination to apply gender studies. Marten Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* (Groningen: Cuneiform Monographs 14, 2000).
- 14 Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine*, pp. 8–12.
- 15 Karel van der Toorn, 'La Pureté rituelle au Proche-Orient ancien', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 206 (1989), pp. 339–56, esp. pp. 344–5.
- 16 van der Toorn, 'La Pureté rituelle', p. 346, nr. 26 iv 35–36; Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (Assen and Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1985), pp. 50–53. See also, van der Toorn, 'La Pureté rituelle', p. 346 and cf. CAD M/1 s.v., pp. 189–195 'oath, curse'. Van der Toorn also relates the terms designing 'prohibition, sin, guilt, error, etc.' (*ikkibu, anzillu, arnu, šērtu, gillatu, hiṭṭu, asakku*, etc.) to the sphere of cultic purity and impurity.
- 17 van der Toorn, 'La Pureté rituelle', pp. 352–3.
- 18 van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, p. 27.
- 19 Walther Sallaberger, 'Reinheit', *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 11 (2006–8), pp. 295–9; Walther Sallaberger, 'Körperliche Reinheit und soziale Grenzen in Mesopotamien', in Peter Burschel and Christoph Marx (eds), *Reinheit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2011), pp. 17–45.
- 20 Sallaberger, 'Reinheit', p. 295.
- 21 Sallaberger, 'Reinheit', p. 295.
- 22 <http://knppr.srheacademy.ac.uk/technicalterms/#letter_P> accessed 31 May 2013. Since moved to <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/knppr/technicalterms/#letter_P>. The 'Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire' project offers a massive quantity of information on both primary and secondary sources, as well as summaries and resources on the Neo-Assyrian empire, a period that has provided us with a large amount of written cuneiform evidence on a variety of issues. The newness of this project, which has turned to digital technologies to make the most of it, together with the will it shows of synthesising previous literature, the access to, and use of updated information, as well as the easy and immediate accessibility to its contents, make it a handy resource for both

general public and scholars.

- 23 CAD L s.v., p. 258, fem. *lu'ūtu*.
- 24 That is the case of the term (*m*)*usukkatu*, translated as 'impure woman (due to menstruation, birth, etc.)' by most dictionaries and authors. The specific problems such terms pose will be dealt with in future articles by the present authors.
- 25 van der Toorn, 'La Pureté rituelle', p. 348.
- 26 Erica Reiner points out that no term for menses has been identified in Babylonian medical texts. Erica Reiner, 'Babylonian Birth Prognoses', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 72 (1982), pp. 124–38, here p. 129. The topic is most recently reported by Biggs: Robert D. Biggs, 'The Human Body and Sexuality in the Babylonian Medical Texts', in Laura Battini and Pierre Villard, *Médecine et médecins au Proche-Orient ancien: Actes du colloque international organisé à Lyon les 8 et 9 novembre 2002, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée* (Oxford: British Archaeological Records, 2006), pp. 39–52, here p. 42.
- 27 The expression ÚŠ TAR is used to refer to the staunching of blood in general, from nasal bleeding to haemorrhage from a wound (examples in CAD P *sub parāsu* 1d, pp. 167–8). This proves that the expression is non-specifically employed to refer to women's diseases. However, it is clear that the expression ÚŠ MUNUS refers to some sort of vaginal blood discharge, since many of the remedies employed to treat this condition prescribe the insertion of tampons in the patient's womb.
- 28 The expression employed is ÚŠ MUNUS TAR-*si* (BAM 235, BAM 236, and *passim*). The only identified case we have of a named disease regarding vaginal abnormal bleeding in Mesopotamia without the use of ÚŠ in cuneiform sources is that of *nahšātu* (BAM 237, BAM 238, BAM 239 and *passim*).
- 29 Bleeding and childbirth are not unequivocally mentioned as 'taboo' or 'filthy' issues in religious and cultic texts.
- 30 Markham J. Geller, *Renal and Rectal Disease Texts* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 140–41, text 22 rev. iii 14.
- 31 Marten Stol, 'Embryology in Babylonia and the Bible', in Jane Marie Law and Vanessa R. Sasson, *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 137–55, here p. 137. Examples of this expression can be found in therapeutic texts dealing with genito-urinary and rectal diseases. See most recently Geller, *Renal and Rectal Disease Texts*, pp. 40–41, text 1 rev. iv 3; pp. 94–95, text 9 obv. ii 5', and *passim* in the volume.

- 32 [DIŠ] MUNUS GIŠTUKUL *mah-ša-at* 'If a woman is struck by a weapon' (BAM 235: 4).
- 33 Sallaberger, 'Körperliche Reinheit', p. 22. Note, however, a different interpretation in Sallaberger, 'Reinheit'.
- 34 Sallaberger, 'Körperliche Reinheit', p. 22. A similar viewpoint is found in previous studies: Biggs, 'Human Body and Sexuality', p. 43. Biggs quotes Stol: Marten Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, pp. 205–6.
- 35 Michaël Guichard and Lionel Marti, 'Purity in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Paleo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Periods', in Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan (eds), *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 74–5, 85.
- 36 van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, p. 31. Similar ideas are sustained in Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and the Babylonian Woman* (Sheffield: ISOT Press, 1994); Stol, 'Embryology in Babylonia and the Bible', p. 140.
- 37 For a brief introduction to the kingdom of Mari and the cuneiform texts found at this settlement, see A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c.3000–330 BC*, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 95–108.
- 38 Jean-Marie Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari 1/1* (Paris: Archives Royales de Mari XXVI, Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), pp. 110–12.
- 39 A previous commentary on the content of this letter, where some lines were translated, had already been published by Durand in 1987: Jean-Marie Durand, 'L'Organisation de l'espace dans le palais de Mari: Le témoignage des textes', in Edmond Lévy, *Le Système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg 19–22 juin 1985* (Strasbourg: Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg, Travaux du Centre de Recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce Antiques, 1987), pp. 39–110.
- 40 'He has said: "May my daughter's belongings (15) be (thus) deposited in her home, (16) (but) my daughter should live with her husband, (17) and for 5 or 6 days (18) she should leave (the palace) and (19) occupy her residence/home"'. Durand, *Archives Epistolaires de Mari*, p. 111.
- 41 'With regard to women, the monthly number of days of "legal" absence was therefore of about six days, probably taking into account the menstrual cycle, to which notions of 'impurity' were related'. Bertrand Lafont, 'A propos de l'absence cyclique des femmes', *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 45 (1987), pp. 24–5.

- 42 '5 to 6 *days per month* may she retire home'. Lafont, 'A propos de l'absence', p. 24.
- 43 Miquel Civil, 'The 10th Tablet of úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi', *Aula Orientalis* 1 (1983), pp. 45–54.
- 44 These monthly free days were linked to a specific Sumerian term (u4-du-a). Civil, '10th Tablet', p. 52.
- 45 Hartmut Waetzoldt, 'Die Situation der Frauen und Kinder anhand ihrer Einkommensverhältnisse zur Zeit der III. Dynastie von Ur', *Altorientalische Forschungen* 15 (1988), pp. 30–44, esp. pp. 36–37.
- 46 Durand, *Archives Epistolaires de Mari*; Durand, 'L'Organisation de l'espace dans le palais de Mari'; Lafont, 'A propos de l'absence', respectively. Nele Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lim: La population féminine des Palais d'après les archives royales de Mari* (Paris: Mémoires de NABU, 5 / Florilegium Marianum 4, Société pour l'Étude du Proche-Orient Ancien (SEPOA), 1999), p. 18 n. 103.
- 47 'It seems women used to leave the palace for the duration of their menses'. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lim*, p. 32.
- 48 'Now...a servant of the king has become pure (again) and she is (re)entering the palace...[My father] told me about women who do not have the right to leave/go out'. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lim*, pp. 232–3 = M. 11343.
- 49 'The text doesn't mention what the nature of that impurity might have been, but we can suppose it alludes to her menses'. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lim*, p. 18 n. 13.
- 50 'Moreover, it is also known, thanks to the corpus of Mari, that women living in the harem and, more broadly, in the palace, left it when menstruating due to reasons of ritual impurity'. Adelina Millet Albà, 'Le Harem de Sîn-iqišam', in Önhân Tunca and Abd el-Masih Baghdo, *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)*, vol. 3: *Les Trouvailles épigraphiques et sigillographiques du chantier I (2000–2002)* (Louvain, Paris and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2008), pp. 239–79, for the quoted translation, see p. 247.
- 51 Millet Albà, 'Le Harem de Sîn-iqišam', p. 247 n. 30.
- 52 Dominique Charpin, 'Patron and Client: Zimri-Lim and Asqudum the Diviner', in Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 248–69. For the quoted translation, see pp. 258–9.
- 53 Charpin, 'Patron and Client', p. 259.

- 54 Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the Kings of Mari: A New Translation, with Historical Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), p. 183.
- 55 Heimpel, *Letters to the Kings of Mari*, p. 183 n. 1.
- 56 A detailed discussion of the influence Biblical Studies have exerted on Assyriology goes beyond the scope of this article. A good overview of the topic is offered in Mogens T. Larsen, 'The Babel/Bibel Controversy and Its Aftermath', in Jack M. Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 4 vols (New York: Scribner's, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 95–106, with previous bibliography. The topic of menstruation and impurity in Biblical and Christian traditions in general has attracted much scholarly attention. Among the many academic studies on the topic, see Charlotte Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- 57 Jack M. Sasson, 'The Posting of Letters with Divine Messages', in Dominique Charpin and J. M. Durand (eds), *Florilegium marianum*, 2: *Recueil d'études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot* (Paris: Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 3, SEPOA, 1994), pp. 299–316. For the quoted excerpt, see p. 304 n. 14.
- 58 Julia M. Asher-Greve and A. Lawrence Asher, 'From Thales to Foucault... and back to Sumer', in Jirí Prosecký, *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Prague, July 1–5, 1996* (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic Oriental Institute, 1998), pp. 29–40, here p. 39.
- 59 Mireia López-Bertran and Carmen Aranegui, 'Terracotas Púnicas representando a mujeres: Nuevos códigos de lectura para su interpretación', *Saguntum* 43 (2011), pp. 83–94.
- 60 Critical commentaries to women being considered a monolithic identity have been done especially from *queer* and post-feminist positions. One of the main sustainers of this position has been Judith Butler. For some key concepts, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).
- 61 Nancy Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism', in Sandra Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, pp. 35–53, here p. 41.
- 62 Margarita Sánchez Romero, 'Maternidad y Prehistoria: Prácticas de reproducción, relación y socialización', in VVAA, *Las mujeres en la Prehistoria* (Valencia: Diputación de Valencia, 2006), pp. 119–37, esp. pp. 120–22.

- 63 Maria Encarna Sanahuja Yll, *Cuerpos sexuados, objetos y prehistoria* (Valencia: Cátedra, 2002), p. 179.
- 64 Marina Picazo, 'Hearth and Home: The Timing of Maintenance Activities', in Jenny Moore and Eleanor Scott, *Invisible People and Processes* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1997), pp. 59–67.
- 65 For an analysis of this phenomenon from the twelfth century onwards, see Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 66 Sánchez Romero, 'Maternidad y Prehistoria', p. 121.
- 67 Zainab Bahrani, 'Sex as Symbolic Form: Erotism and the Body in Mesopotamian Art', in Parpola and Whiting, *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East* pp. 53–8, esp. pp. 56–8.

Lamentation Motifs in Medieval Hagiography

Anne E. Bailey

A blind woman at Becket's shrine felt a great disturbance in her head, as if she were engulfed in a raging furnace. Ripping away her veil and clawing at the garments at her breast she fell to the floor and lay there for the space of an hour, after which, opening her eyes and picking herself up she burst out, 'I can see'.¹

Miraculous cures are occasions of high drama in medieval miracle accounts, often characterised by tears, screams, writhing and collapses into unconsciousness. The above example, taken from Benedict of Peterborough's twelfth-century *miracula* of Thomas Becket, was singled out for comment by the social historian Ronald Finucane in the late 1970s. Reacting to the blind woman's conduct with incomprehension bordering on distaste, Finucane concluded that medieval women were psychologically susceptible to the emotionally charged atmosphere at a saint's shrine.² Although a longer deliberation on the topic in 2006 by Sarah Hopper was more sympathetic, it still failed to find a plausible explanation as to why 'hysteria and even hysterics' were 'a significant component of the medieval woman's pilgrim experience', and little attention has been given to the subject since.³

Had Finucane and Hopper taken a wider socio-religious approach, they may have recognised that this pattern of female behaviour was not especially specific to the cult of saints, nor to the Middle Ages. It appears, for example, in a slightly different guise in a vernacular romance written by one of Benedict of Peterborough's twelfth-century contemporaries, Chrétien de Troyes. In *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion*, Chrétien includes an episode describing the widow, Laudine, grieving at her husband's bier. This scene is particularly striking in respect of Laudine's behaviour, because the widow conducts herself very much like the blind girl at Becket's tomb: she rips at her clothes, tears her hair and falls to the ground in a faint.⁴

The tearing of the hair, the laceration of the body and the rending of clothes are standard, formulaic gestures associated with what is often conceived as a peculiarly 'feminine' ritual: lamentation. The ritual lament is not a spontaneous outpouring of raw emotion, but an orchestrated display of grief found in many different times and cultures.⁵ Although revisionist scholars remind us that lamentation was also practised by men, it is generally agreed that, in most societies, women played a 'prominent role' in ritual mourning,

and that representations of grief are ‘profoundly shaped to gender’.⁶

The practice of lamenting the dead seems to have its origins in the ancient east, and is first attested in Europe in the time of Homer.⁷ In the Greek tradition, lamentation was articulated through body language remarkably similar to that attributed to female pilgrims in medieval miracle accounts: that is, through tears, wailing, erratic gestures and – in one of its more extreme forms – through fainting and madness.⁸ As a social practice, lamentation survived into the Middle Ages, although the Christian authorities in the west regarded it with a certain amount of ambivalence. Theologians may have been happy to pen elegiac laments about their Christian heroes in the Old Testament tradition, but – as will be shown – lamentation as an unregulated, popular custom was repeatedly denounced as pagan, irrational and anti-Christian.

Although the cult of saints initially appears to have little to do with rituals of mourning, there are some significant connections. Pre-eminent among these is the fact that medieval saint devotion owed much to older pre-Christian practices mourning dead ancestors and heroes: a development readily acknowledged by Augustine in the fourth century.⁹ To all intents and purposes, the Christian patron saint – the community’s spiritual *paterfamilias* – took the place of the deceased pagan hero in the hearts and minds of early Christians.¹⁰ It is well known that many elements of pagan ritual were assimilated into local saint veneration in the medieval west, and Christian cult devotees certainly shared at least one aspiration with traditional lamenters: by way of their ‘passionate invocations’, both sought to ‘enter into communication with the dead’.¹¹

These factors may have had a special relevance for women. In medieval Europe, as in ancient Greece, the care of deceased relatives and the preservation of their memories were – in private, at least – the responsibility of women. The custody of the dead was, in other words, part of a woman’s family duties. One reason for the popularity of saints’ cults with medieval women may have been that they facilitated, and even fostered, the continuation of this customary female role. Perhaps most obviously, women visited local shrines to pray for the souls of their relatives – both living and dead.¹² However, just as importantly, devotees were encouraged to visualise the saints as surrogate ancestors. In twelfth-century miracle accounts the saints were often cast in the role of spiritual kin: St Æbbe is described as ‘motherly’, both paternal and maternal traits are attributed to St Erkenwald, and St Frideswide of Oxford has been imagined as sister, daughter, bride, brother and mother all rolled into one.¹³ Given the similarities between medieval saints’ cults and pagan festivals of the dead, it would not be surprising if devotion to those whom Peter Brown called ‘the very special dead’ continued to be conveyed through the traditional female language of grief.¹⁴

This is not to claim, however, that this type of medieval religious expression was necessarily practised by all cult devotees at all places and times, or that hagiographers accurately recorded the ritual activities they observed. Indeed, it seems likely that the clerics and monks writing up miracle accounts would have set these popular practices within an appropriate Christian framework, and they may even have given undue emphasis to women's participation. Since there is very little reliable evidence for lamentation as a social practice in this period, this study focuses on the lament as a hagiographical discourse, examining some of the ways in which authors of miracle narratives drew on literary models in order to portray this form of popular devotion within recognised Christian boundaries. I also suggest that these customary practices and beliefs evolved into spiritual exercises performed by celebrated mystics in the later Middle Ages, although thirteenth- and fourteenth-century hagiographers, like their predecessors, often struggled to accommodate them within the aegis of acceptable religious observance and belief.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to reassess the medieval hagiographical melodramas commented upon by Finucane and Hopper by framing them within a ritual, rather than in a psychological, context. With reference to miracle collections produced in England and France during the long twelfth century (c.1080–c.1200) it argues that, far from signifying spontaneous female hysteria, the volatile scenes depicted in hagiography represent ritualised performances with long-established cultural and literary precedents.

Literary inheritance

Much of the evidence for the lamentation practices mentioned above derives from descriptive narrative sources. Some of the best-known literary representations are found in Greek tragedy, such as Euripides' *The Trojan Women* in which Hecuba heads a chorus of women lamenting the fall of Trojan heroes with weeping and wailing, cheek laceration and fainting.¹⁵ Such literary motifs were transmitted into the Latin medieval west where they seemingly became part of the general cultural currency. Indeed, modern scholars have argued that the classical lament informs a surprising range of medieval religious art and writing from the *Pietà* image to Augustine's *Confessions* and the letters of Abelard and Heloise.¹⁶ Nonetheless, it should also be recognised that medieval lamentation motifs were the product of wider cultural influences, such as the Old Testament which channelled a mixture of Middle Eastern ideas directly into the medieval world through the Psalms, the Book of Lamentation and David's Lament (2 Sam. 1:17–27).¹⁷ Indeed, sources for some early medieval *planctus* – lyrical compositions based on the classical Greek *elegos* – include Greek tragedy, the Old and New Testaments and the apocryphal gospels.¹⁸

Although passionate demonstrations of grief are not uncommon in early

medieval narrative sources, these themes took on particular significance in the twelfth-century west with the development of a cultural movement which sought to explore emotional, soul-searching forms of expression through religion, literature and art.¹⁹ The *planctus* genre flourished in this intellectual climate, and it is perhaps no coincidence that it was during this period that authors of Latin miracle narratives describe the suffering and anguish of supplicants at saints' shrines in far greater detail than had been the case in the past.²⁰

The idea of lamentation, then, seems to have been very much in vogue in clerical culture during the twelfth century. However, this does not fully explain how largely pre-Christian themes from Greece, Asia Minor and the Middle East came to shape hagiographic conventions in the medieval west. In order to understand fully how lamentation motifs came to be adopted into the hagiographical canon and given Christian meaning, it is necessary to trace some of the literary processes at work in this cultural assimilation. A good starting point is the topos of the mourning mother, which appears to weave its way almost seamlessly from the ancient world into twelfth-century miracle stories and beyond.

Tropes of maternal mourning

Mothers were key mourners in the Greco-Roman and ancient Middle-Eastern worlds.²¹ In the medieval west, maternal grief retained its importance, and in early Christian writing it was symbolised by the Old Testament matriarch Rachel weeping for the sons of Israel. However, with the rise of Marian devotion in the twelfth century, Rachel seems to have been equated with, and then supplanted by, the Virgin Mary.²² At the same time gestures of grief, suffering and emotion were beginning to creep into visual images of Mary at the Crucifixion.²³

Grieving mothers are a ubiquitous feature of miracle collections in twelfth-century England and France. In the *Life and Miracles of William of Norwich*, the story of William's murder in 1144 is carefully constructed to echo Christ's Passion: a literary artifice employed to bolster the claim that the boy was murdered by the Jews.²⁴ William's mother is given a leading role, and is depicted lamenting her son's death in a manner reminiscent of the Virgin's lament in some forms of early medieval *planctus*: 'with torn hair and clapping of hands she ran from one [bystander] to another weeping and wailing through the streets like a mad woman'.²⁵

However, the trope of the lamenting mother more frequently appears in the context of miraculously resuscitated children. The Becket miracles are especially rich in examples. One account describes the grief of the Countess of Clare whose infant son is believed to have died of an unspecified illness. On returning home from church, the Countess is greeted with the terrible

news of the baby's death. Her response is to snatch up her son's lifeless body, and she is described adopting the customary stance of the *Pietà*: she 'raised his body in her hands, pressed it to her breast, cradled it in her arms'.²⁶ The mother's emotional outburst is considered excessive by onlookers, and is juxtaposed with the more rational conduct of a male onlooker. Interestingly, this man happens to be the Countess's chaplain and, since this display of feminine grief is to prove an effective method of summoning divine help, we may assume that the narrator's sympathies lie with the bereaved Countess rather than with the disapproving representative of the Church. This is an important point to which this article will return.

In more general terms, men and women often approach death differently in miracle stories from this period: women with excessive emotion, and men with quiet restraint.²⁷ This is highlighted in another Becket story featuring an eight-year-old reportedly drowned in a lake while playing in a quarry. His mother, we are told, vented her anguish publicly with weeping and lamentation (*planctus*), but his father grieved quietly and privately with sighs and groans.²⁸ As a story in a contemporary French collection makes clear, 'weeping and wailing' (*fletu et clamore*) were considered unworthy of men.²⁹

Where 'dead' children are concerned, lamentation seems an appropriate reaction. In miracle accounts, however, the topos is often extended to other, less obvious, situations. In the case of Henry of Hythe, the boy's mother is said to have 'wept as if bereaved' (*tanquam orbata defleret*), despite her son being very much alive. He is simply crippled.³⁰ A more complex example is related by the Waltham chronicler. A pious woman, 'truly a mother' (*vere mater*), is portrayed lamenting over her ailing son in the abbey church. Readers are presented with a tableau suggestive of a customary death scene as the mother, standing weeping in the manner of the Virgin at the foot of the cross, heads a lament of female kin.³¹ It is as if the son is already dead. However, in this story there is no death, and no body to mourn. Instead of a bier, the lamenting women gather around the crucifix, and the focus of the lament has subtly shifted from a living, suffering son to the suffering, dying Christ.³²

This change of perspective is crucial for understanding the mechanics of lamentation in miracle narratives in which women, petitioning a saint for a child's recovery, express themselves as mourners. This is made explicit in the story of the Countess of Clare in which a spoken lament, put into the Countess's mouth by the hagiographer, William of Canterbury, is incorporated into the narrative in much the same way as the *planctus* was inserted into medieval liturgical drama. The Countess's *planctus* includes a monologue addressed to the dead – in this instance to St Thomas – in rhetoric which has parallels to Greek funeral oration as detailed by Margaret Alexiou. Thus, the Countess bemoans her plight through a series of rhetorical questions, alternatively reproaching and beseeching the saint. Stylistic devices typical of

lamentation are employed, such as the appropriation of a tripartite structure; motifs of praise and reproof; contrasts between past and present; and repeated refrains.³³

St Thomas, once you returned my son to me; why did you resolve to return him, causing maternal grief? You healed the disease that caused him miserable tortures; woe is me, who has sinned; what command have I transgressed, that I am now condemned to bereavement? Return, holy martyr, him whom you returned. I vow that clothed in wool, barefoot, as an outcast, I will again seek your tomb in devotion. Return him whom you once returned to me.³⁴

Significantly, the Countess appears to be grieving for her own fate as much as for that of her son. Her lament is for the self; it is an act of self-mourning.³⁵ More precisely, the Countess is lamenting her sins, since it is implied that her past sinfulness is responsible for her current sorrow. In Christian terms, it is a lament for the soul, a soul metaphorically lost or dead.³⁶ It should also be observed that the Countess offers to bargain her way out of her situation with an act of atonement. She promises that, should St Thomas grant her request, she will visit his shrine as an ‘outcast’ (*abjecta*), and in the manner and attire of one dead. As was common in the ancient Greek world, this medieval lamenter promises to undertake a rite of passage which parallels that of the departed soul.³⁷

Although we are not told the details of the Countess's promised pilgrimage, it might be imagined with reference to an episode in another miracle account in which a noblewoman seeking a cure for blindness is described sitting before the portable reliquary of St Ursmer of Flanders. According to the narrative, this faithful devotee kept vigil both day and night, weeping and fasting, and holding a candle like a mourner: ‘As others laughed, she wept; as others sang, she mourned’.³⁸ In this instance, lamentation is also a penance. The noblewoman's anguish, moreover, not only moves God to mercy, it also inspires compassion and devotion in others. This penitent has become an *exemplum*, setting a religious example not only to bystanders in the story, but also to listeners or readers of the text.

Miracle stories of the period are full of suppliants appealing to a saint through the ritual language of the lament, and – as Finucane and Hopper observed – the most vociferous of these lamenters are women. One way of examining this phenomenon more closely is by focusing on three key aspects of lamentation which have been recognised as the ‘generic signs of mourning’: weeping, wailing and violent gesticulations.³⁹

Weeping

Loud, public weeping is usually an intrinsic element of ritual lamentation. In

the Greco-Roman tradition, weeping was seen as appropriate behaviour for women, not least because weeping was usually deemed unmanly.⁴⁰ This is an opinion echoed in twelfth-century *miracula*; in one instance, a father who succumbs to weeping is said to have ‘put aside his manhood’.⁴¹ Another man derides weeping as womanly (*muliebris*).⁴² Aristotle had surmised that women were especially given to tears, and women in miracle narratives certainly seem to indulge in extraordinary amounts of weeping.⁴³ Female flows are likened to springs and fountains in the Scriptural tradition, and their profusion is repeatedly marked by references to their prodigious volume and duration.⁴⁴ One woman is reported as being so completely subsumed in her role as tear-shedder that she is referred to as ‘an instrument of lamentation’ (*in lamentum conversum est organum*).⁴⁵

However, women's tears in these sources are far more than passive expressions of sorrow; they are also presented as a powerful intercessory force. A few well-placed wifely tears persuade the husband of one woman to consent to her pilgrimage, and the husband of another to ‘convert’ (*convertere*) to St Thomas.⁴⁶ Since ritual weeping is usually recognised as a means of communicating with the dead, it is significant that intercessory tears are also targeted at saints in the stories.⁴⁷ Examples include the woman who ‘conquered’ (*vicit*) St Frideswide with her tears, and the three blind women, lost and abandoned on a foreign shore, who weep in despair and are rewarded with a heaven-sent guide.⁴⁸ On a more epic scale, the city of Mende is reportedly saved from destruction by the tears of mothers and virgins.⁴⁹

Maternal lachrymosity is shown to be especially powerful. Weeping mothers seem to have an especially winning effect on the Virgin Mary: in the Rocamadour collection they save drowning men, ward off demons, restore sanity and even free captives.⁵⁰ The language in these narratives echoes that of the Vulgate Old Testament describing Rachel weeping for the sons of Israel.⁵¹ Like Rachel, women in miracle accounts weep so forcefully that their tears are said to reach heaven.⁵²

Women in these stories also weep for themselves, especially in the context of illness. The curative property of tears was well-known in the Middle Ages, and women – whose humoral constitutions were considered more fluid than men's – were especially thought to benefit from a good purgative sob.⁵³ In miracle narratives, this is particularly evident in cures for blindness, where tears literally unblock the eyes and restore lost vision.⁵⁴ Tears also cleanse the soul, as illustrated by Thomas of Monmouth's detailed report of a female sinner visiting William of Norwich's woodland chapel. As her fellow pilgrims step forward to make their devotions, the sinner's route is obstructed by an invisible force. Only when the woman's tears of repentance ‘flowed into the heavens’ (*celis influit*) is the impediment removed and the channel of divine communication re-opened.⁵⁵ In miracle narratives, prayer and tears are a forceful combination, empowering women in particular to forge a path to

God.

Wailing

Lamentation is often a noisy, vocal affair, and this was no less true in the ancient world where tears came secondary to the *eiulatio* (ululation), the ‘throwing out’ of the voice in a high-pitched, wordless wail.⁵⁶ In Euripides’ tragedy *The Trojan Women*, Hecuba called upon the deceased with her ‘wailings’; in this context, ritual cries had to be forceful enough to ‘wake the dead’.⁵⁷

Although this aspect of the lament is less evident – and perhaps less tolerated – in the western Christian tradition, it seems to be present in the twelfth-century *miracula* as both an expression of suffering and as a dramatic appeal to the saints. Like a cripple appealing to St James at Reading Abbey, many women in these stories issue ‘the most piercing cries’ and ‘scream in all directions’.⁵⁸ Although the clamour of a blind woman at the church at Rocamadour was allegedly so shrill and loud that she had to be hushed by the monks, an equally noisy woman at Malmesbury Abbey is described as winning praise from both men and God.⁵⁹ Duration is often added to volume. The daughter of Aylward of Canterbury, for example, is said to have shrieked for two days.⁶⁰ In the Becket miracles, female voices are fortified still further through the exercise of crying out en masse. One bereaved mother calls on her neighbours for vocal aid, and five widows add their efforts to the ululating (*eiulare*) of another.⁶¹ Like their tears, women's vocal exuberances are occasionally claimed as being so intense that they battered the gates of heaven.⁶²

Despite the biblical injunction against female voices in church (1 Cor. 14:34–5), women in miracle narratives are said to fill sanctified places with their clamorous outpourings. If we are to believe Thomas of Monmouth, the priory church at Norwich must have been a particularly raucous place, reverberating with the cries of numerous sickly suppliants.⁶³ Yet noisy emotionalism seems to have paid off, and in the narratives it is always rewarded with a cure. Whether despised or admired, persistently loud women were apparently hard to ignore. As in the case of the deaf and dumb Polilia, whose weeping and moaning were her sole methods of communication, this aspect of lamentation seems to have given women a ‘voice’, and in these texts it sometimes seems as if they made the most of it.⁶⁴

Violent gesticulation

In pre-Christian Greece, lamentation was accompanied by ‘emotive gestures of the body’ which included the tearing of hair, skin and clothes; the raising or beating of hands; and erratic running around.⁶⁵ In the medieval west, similar ‘gestures of despair’ can be observed in visual art, liturgical drama and, as we

have seen, in contemporary romance.⁶⁶ They can also be found scattered throughout twelfth-century *miracula*, where their more extreme manifestations are often ascribed to women.

In the *Miracula Sancti Erkenwaldi*, compiled by a canon of St Paul's around 1140, the female inhabitants of a burning city – London – set up a lament. The details are revealing: with hair loose and clothes dishevelled, the women run here and there, beating their hands, weeping and ululating (*eiulare*) in a public show of grief strikingly reminiscent of Euripides' lamenting Trojan women mentioned above. They are pleading with their saint to save their city in the manner of Old Testament lamenters.⁶⁷

The hagiographer presents the women's actions as disorderly and confused, and juxtaposes this emotional reaction to the rational, calmer responses of men. The association of lamentation with irrational emotion, implied here, is a recurrent trope in western medieval texts. Chrétien de Troyes's grief-stricken Laudine, for example, is shown giving vent to emotional turmoil in a manner so violent that it appears to be verging on madness. Clawing her body, ripping her clothes and falling into a swoon, she is said to be 'crazed with grief'.⁶⁸

Similar behaviour in contemporary miracle narratives is sometimes more explicitly associated with madness. The twelfth-century appendix to Goscelin's St Ivo collection recounts the episode of a *materfamilias* attacked by a snake while sleeping in a meadow. The snake is depicted entering the victim's body through her mouth, at which point the woman awakes. In the narrative, the *materfamilias* replicates Laudine's behaviour almost gesture-for-gesture: 'filling the heavens with loud cries, she showed her grief in her face, gesture and voice. She ripped her clothes, tore her hair, furrowed her face with her nails, tried to kill herself with her hands, and then fell to the ground'.⁶⁹

Running around the meadows in disarray, the *materfamilias* is likened to a Bacchante by the narrator. This seemingly oblique reference to an obsolete Greek mystery cult is interesting. The bacchanal was originally a women's rite, popularly believed to be a form of 'ritual madness' whereby worshippers sought communion with the god Dionysius through the mind-altering state of *ekstasis*.⁷⁰ Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*, describes the terrible transformation which descends upon Agave, the daughter of Cadmus, as she sleeps in the open. Agave leaps up, and utters a ritual cry which signals to her fellow maenads the onset of madness.⁷¹ The same opening sequence is found in the St Ivo example. The *materfamilias* falls asleep – again outdoors – and, on waking, she cries aloud, alerting her companions. As the frenzy takes hold of her, the stricken woman – like Euripides' maenads – runs about erratically, pulling at her hair and clothes, finally falling to the ground in a seizure.

Bacchic rites were little more than a cultural memory in Euripides' day, but the playwright's strongly gendered version might be interpreted as an extreme variant of Greek ritual behaviour in which the cry of the mourner becomes the

ololugé, the ‘shriek of ecstasy’.⁷² In Euripides’ play, ritual frenzy is also manifested by other tell-tale signs: maenads convulse their limbs, foam at the mouth, roll their eyes, attack those around them with superhuman strength and are represented as being literally possessed by the god who ‘enters the bodies’ of his devotees, causing their madness.⁷³ Although there is no evidence that Euripides’ play was known in Europe before the fourteenth century, the characteristic traits of Dionysiac possession were recognised, commented upon and given demonic connotations by the Church Fathers.⁷⁴ It may be more than mere coincidence that Euripides’ vision of ritual madness has parallels in twelfth-century hagiographical accounts of demonic possession, such as the St Ivo story in which the *materfamilias*’s behaviour is said to be caused by Satan entering her body in the form of a snake.⁷⁵

Possessed behaviour not only appears in the context of illness and madness in miracle accounts, it also has wider uses. It is particularly instructive, for example, to compare the stories of two women ‘cured’ by William of Norwich as related by Thomas of Monmouth. The first woman is apparently possessed by a demon, and is dragged kicking and screaming into Norwich cathedral. Her symptoms include loud and terrible cries, feet-drumming, clothes-tearing and a final collapse into sleep.⁷⁶ The second woman is the tearful penitent barred entry to William of Norwich’s woodland shrine, mentioned above. Strikingly, Thomas seems to re-use the same ‘possession’ formula to describe the penitent’s behaviour although, as we are well aware, this particular protagonist is no demoniac. She is merely a sinner apparently seeking communion with the divine through a ritual performance suggestive of mind-losing behaviour.⁷⁷ Given that the symptomatic characteristics of lamentation, madness, demonic possession and penitence appear to be indistinguishable in many of these stories, the line drawn by hagiographers between ritual expression and madness often seems to be perilously thin.

Lamentation and the cult of saints

Writers of miracle accounts, then, generally seem to have approved of excessive weeping and wailing at saints’ shrines, and sometimes even depict more radical forms of ritual behaviour as spiritually beneficial. However, this enthusiastic adoption of lamentation motifs into the hagiographical canon poses something of a puzzle, because scholars frequently point out that Christian theologians repeatedly denounced, and legislated against, noisy demonstrations of grief. Lamentation was literally a far cry from the quiet sobriety of Christian worship recommended by the early Church, and patristic texts often condemned these popular activities as pagan, irrational and ‘effeminate’.⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, for example, was particularly vehement in this respect, and likened female lamenters to Bacchic revellers.⁷⁹ Although the gradual Christianisation of death rituals slowly removed many pagan elements from official worship, there remained a lingering fear that these

practices continued in private.⁸⁰ In the eleventh century, Burchard of Worms's *Decretum* still expressed anxieties concerning rowdy funerals, and an English miracle story records the divine punishment meted out to funeral attendees who unwisely lamented 'in the manner of Bacchantes' (*ritu bachantium*).⁸¹

Historians considering this issue for other periods frequently link the disapproval of popular lamentation with the fear of civil unrest.⁸² It is sometimes suggested that it was the act of taking the lament outside onto the streets – rather than the lament itself – which triggered political tension. In this respect, it is perhaps significant that, in miracle accounts, a distinction is made between unregulated expressions of grief – for example, at 'popular' funerals – and those channelled towards Christian ends under the watchful eyes of cult authorities. This can be illustrated by returning to William of Norwich's mother, described by Thomas of Monmouth as lamenting her son's death 'through the streets and open places' (*per vicus et plateas*).

Unmistakably, this is a voice of female protest, aimed to whip up emotion and support for what may well have turned into a popular vendetta against the Jews. It is notable that Thomas is uncomfortable about this public display which he refers to as 'womanly' (*muliebris*), 'rash' (*temerarius*) and 'mad' (*amens*).⁸³ The text goes on to reveal how these volatile emotions are directed away from the streets and into a supervised cult, and the next time lamentation motifs appear, it is in the relatively benign context of official ritual devotion, as mentioned above.

With reference to late Antiquity, Peter Brown envisaged the cult of saints as aiding the process of social cohesion by channelling the aspirations of 'potentially disruptive' elements into an all-embracing Christian culture.⁸⁴ Although Brown and other scholars have also imagined saints' cults as places where 'popular' beliefs successfully fused with formal Christian practice, the process of incorporating some of the more difficult and tenacious forms of popular culture, such as lamentation, into authorised religious practice would always be problematic. This might be exemplified by the figure of Margery Kempe, a pious fifteenth-century laywoman from Lynn in Norfolk, today renowned for her extensive pilgrimages and her exuberant style of devotion. Margery's religious enthusiasm – manifested through much the same type of behaviour as seen in miracle accounts – seems to have been regarded by her contemporaries both as a public nuisance and also as a sign of true piety. Again, context is everything. Reading between the lines of Margery's autobiographical 'Book', it is invariably Margery's unsupervised, public displays of religiosity, rather than those overseen in private by her confessors and other figures of authority, which rouse suspicions of demonic possession and non-conformist dissent.⁸⁵

Lament motifs in late medieval saints' lives

Margery Kempe's fanatical emotionalism was inspired by saintly precedents as much as by popular culture because, by the fifteenth century, weeping, wailing and erratic gesticulations had taken on new importance with the development of affective female piety, especially in the Low Countries and Italy.⁸⁶ Hagiography from this later period not only portrays female mystics adopting some very familiar devotional habits, it also shows these practices being exercised to heroic extremes.

Although weeping became an important stage in the spiritual development of both men and women, some of the most fanatical late-medieval weepers seem to have been female. In female saints' *Lives*, tears are shed even more profusely than in miracle accounts: in the *Life* of the Beguine Marie de Oignies, for instance, the biblical 'fountain' becomes a 'river' (*fluvius*) as Marie's tears collect in a muddy puddle at her feet.⁸⁷ Intercessory weeping is often taken a stage further in these texts. Catherine of Siena, said to speak to Christ 'more by way of tears than with her lips', is described not only weeping for her family but also for strangers and sinners.⁸⁸ Penitential tears equally are wept on a higher level, with occasional echoes back to twelfth-century hagiography. Like the penitent noblewoman weeping beside St Ursmer's relics, the ever-tearful Catherine is likened to Mary Magdalene, and both women are said to weep copiously, despite living blameless and pious lives.⁸⁹

Noisy expressions of grief similarly develop into a female religious virtue in the later Middle Ages. One of the most vocal of all pious celebrities was the Flemish mystic Christina *Mirabilis* who, according to Thomas de Cantimpré, shouted 'louder than anyone we have known'.⁹⁰ Margery Kempe famously 'roared' on and off for ten years, and Marie de Oignies was famed for her spontaneous wailing, especially when in rapture.⁹¹ The theme of noisy women in church continues; in their respective *Lives*, Catherine of Siena has to be hushed by a priest, and Marie de Oignies absents herself from the presence of other worshippers for fear of upsetting them.⁹² Marie's hagiographer, Jacques de Vitry, explains that the closer Marie drew to God, the louder she became. Nearing death, she opened her throat and issued a high-pitched cry which she kept up, almost continuously, for three days.⁹³

By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, erratic 'gestures of despair' had also become a part of female spirituality, and were lauded as signs of divine grace or as a mystical dance.⁹⁴ When performed by Beatrice of Nazareth, they seemingly involved 'gesturing' (*gestiens*) and the striking of her body; when executed by Lutgard of Aywières, they included rapid running about, to and fro.⁹⁵ Mind-losing behaviour often results in fainting and rapture in these accounts. In a state she referred to as madness (*orewoet*), the Flemish mystic Hadewijch regularly found herself rapt from her bed and physical pain for days at a time.⁹⁶ The joyous Beatrice of Nazareth also seems to have embraced madness as a spiritual asset; in her *Life*, *insania* becomes one of the

seven stages of loving God.⁹⁷

Beatrice's madness was cleverly presented by her hagiographer as *insania amoris*, which drew the desiring soul towards God in an acceptable way. However, no such artifice glosses the story of the thirteenth-century 'village lunatic', Christina Mirabilis.⁹⁸ Suspected of being a demoniac, but actually claiming to be 'rapt in spirit', Christina is described taking to the woods like a madwoman, undergoing rituals of self-harm, leaping around convulsively, rolling on the ground, contorting her limbs and talking to the dead.⁹⁹ Christina's hagiographer asserted that her strange proclivities were signs of piety, but in the thirteenth century – as at other times – this type of female behaviour was always going to be problematic, if not downright risky.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

This study of lamentation motifs in twelfth-century hagiography seems to pose a question rarely raised by modern scholars: to what extent are the gendered activities depicted in hagiography realistic reflections of women's devotional activities rather than the literary products of conventional motifs? Although a discussion about the relationship between cultural practices and religious representations of those practices is beyond the scope of this chapter, a clue may be given by Margery Kempe. Margery, it may be recalled, self-consciously styled herself on female role models whose stories and reputations were, in turn, heavily dependent on – as we have discovered – an interconnecting chain of exemplars stretching back into the past. As Margery's story suggests, women with pious aspirations must often have tried to shape their lived reality as closely as possible around Christian ideals. To some extent, real life experiences and exemplary fictional ones must have been mutually inspiring and reinforcing, so that they culturally influenced one another in a variety of ways.

Although lamentation motifs are not exclusive to women's stories in medieval hagiography, it is significant that the more extreme manifestations of affective piety are usually attributed to them. This may be explained, in part, by cultural tradition: in the Christian west, gestures of mourning and suffering were especially associated with women. What is especially interesting, however, is that the body language of lamentation seems to empower women with a certain degree of religious agency in miracle accounts, and it is this aspect of lamentation which finds its fullest expression in some mystical forms of female spirituality in the late Middle Ages.

In the 1980s, Caroline Walker Bynum famously drew scholars' attention to the emotional and body-orientated piety depicted in female saints' *vitae* in the later Middle Ages, arguing that the feminine body often provided 'a means of access to the divine'.¹⁰¹ In considering this gendered phenomenon in a wider social and historical context, this chapter has found evidence to suggest that

this form of affective piety did not spring into existence from nowhere around 1200 as scholars are often led to suppose.¹⁰² On the contrary, it is likely that these particular late-medieval religious motifs had a long, and surprisingly well-attested, cultural pedigree.

Notes

The author would like to thank Henrietta Leyser for her helpful comments on an earlier version of this article, and special thanks are due to Sue Morgan and Joanna de Groot for organising the Gender and Religion Colloquium upon which this Special Issue of *Gender & History* is based.

- 1 Benedict of Peterborough, *Miracula S Thomae Cantuariensis*, ed. J. C. Robertson, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, Rolls Series 67 (London, 1876–85), vol. 2, p. 86, as translated and cited by Ronald Finucane. Ronald Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (1977; repr. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 88.
- 2 Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, pp. 88–9.
- 3 Sarah Hopper, *Mothers, Mystics and Merrymakers: Medieval Women Pilgrims* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006), pp. 155–68, here p. 159.
- 4 Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain: Le Chevalier au Lion*, ed. T. B. W. Reid (c.1942; repr. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 33, ll. 1150–1165.
- 5 Indeed, it is still prevalent today in countries as diverse as Egypt and Ireland. See e.g., Lila Abu-Lughod, ‘Islam and the Gendered Discourse of Death’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993), pp. 187–205, here p. 189; Patricia Lysaght, ‘Caoineadh os Cionn Coirp: The Lament of the Dead in Ireland’, *Folklore* 108 (1997), pp. 65–82.
- 6 For revisionist studies, see Ann Suter (ed.), *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Carol Lansing, *Passion, Order, Restraint and Grief in the Medieval Communes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Jennifer C. Vaught (ed.), *Grief and Gender: 700–1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). The citations are from Suter, *Lament*, p. 13; Vaught, *Grief and Gender*, p. 1.
- 7 Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (1985; 2nd edn, London: Bristol Classical, 2001), p. 29. For Homeric laments, see Christos C. Tsagalis, *Epic Grief: Personal Laments in Homer's Iliad* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

- 8 For the Greek lament, see Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974; 2nd edn, Oxford: Rowland and Littlefield, 2002).
- 9 Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 47–8, 2 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), vol. 1, 8.26–7. For this theme, see Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 213–16, 269–72.
- 10 See e.g., Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (1981; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 48–51.
- 11 Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, p. 46.
- 12 See e.g., Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons: Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 92–8; Susan Signe Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3–42; Kathleen Quirk, ‘Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy, 1050–1150’, in Elisabeth Van Houts (ed.), *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past, 700–1300* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001), pp. 53–71.
- 13 *Vita et Miracula S. Æbbe Virginis*, ed. and tr. Robert Bartlett, *The Miracles of St Æbbe of Coldingham and St Margaret of Scotland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 34; Arcoid, *Miracula Sancti Erkenwaldi*, ed. and tr. E. Gordon Whatley, *The Saint of London: The Life and Miracles of St Erkenwald, Text and Translation* (Binghampton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989), pp. 24, 34. For Frideswide, see Simon Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth-century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 176.
- 14 For saints as ‘the very special dead’, see Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, pp. 69–85.
- 15 Euripides, ‘The Trojan Women’, tr. James Morwood, in *The Trojan Women and other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 38–75, in lines 119, 1305, 280, 463–511.
- 16 Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, pp. 24–35; Lansing, *Passion*, pp. 70–98, 99–122; Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978; repr. London: Picador, 1990), pp. 207–9; Nancy A. Jones, ‘By Women’s Tears Redeemed: Female Lament in St Augustine’s *Confessions* and the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise’, in Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller and Charles Platter (eds), *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 15–39.

- 17 Steven Weitzman has argued that Israelite scribes adapted the Syro-Palestinian lament of literary culture for the passage in 2 Samuel. Steven Weitzman, 'David's Lament and the Poetics of Grief in 2 Samuel', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 85 (1995), pp. 341–60.
- 18 Margaret Alexiou identified 1,304 lines of Greek tragedy – including plays of Euripides – in the *Christòs Paschon*. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, p. 64. For *planctus* in the western tradition, see Janthia Yearley, 'A Bibliography of *Planctus*', *Journal of the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society* 4 (1981), pp. 12–52; Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry, 1000–1150* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970; 2nd edn, London: Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies, 1986), pp. 27–9. For biblical themes, see M. J. Toswell, 'Structures of Sorrow: The Lament Psalms in Medieval England', in Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (eds), *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 21–44.
- 19 See Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200* (London: SPCK, 1972).
- 20 For the development of miracle collecting in the west, see Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000–1215* (1982; rev. edn Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).
- 21 See e.g., Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, tr. Corinne Pache (London: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 22 Susan Boynton, 'From the Lament of Rachel to the Lament of Mary: A Transformation in the History of Drama and Spirituality', in Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver and Nicholas Bell (eds), *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 319–40. For Marian devotion in the twelfth century, see Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 121–88.
- 23 For this theme, see Rubin, *Mother of God*, pp. 243–9.
- 24 For William's death and cult, see Yarrow, *Saints and their Communities*, pp. 122–67; Mary D. Anderson, *A Saint at Stake: The Strange Death of William of Norwich, 1144* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).
- 25 *Discerptis crinibus, palmisque in inuicem crebo connexis, flens et eiulans per plateas tanquam amens cursitabat*. Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*, ed. and tr. Augustus Jessopp and Montague Rhodes James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), p. 41.
- 26 *Cadaver manibus attollit, permit ad ubera, foveat inter brachi*. William of

- Canterbury, *Miracula S Thomae Cantuariensis*, ed. J. C. Robertson, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, vol. 1, p. 229.
- 27 This has also been observed by Kathleen Quirk, ‘Men, Women and Miracles in Normandy, 1050–1150’, in Elisabeth van Houts (ed.), *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past, 700–1300* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001), p. 55.
- 28 William of Canterbury, *Miracula*, p. 201.
- 29 *Miraculorum Sancte Marie Rupe Amatoris*, ed. Edmond Albe, *Les Miracles de Notre-Dame de Rocamadour au xii^e siècle* (Toulouse: Le Pérégrinateur, 1996), p. 164.
- 30 William of Canterbury, *Miracula*, p. 188.
- 31 As described, e.g., by Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, p. 6. This stance was celebrated in the thirteenth-century poem the *Stabat Mater*. Laments of the ‘Virgin Standing at the Cross’ and of the ‘Three Marys’ – which this story also echoes – appear more frequently than any other *planctus* in Janthia Yearley’s ‘Bibliography’.
- 32 *The Waltham Chronicle*, ed. Leslie Watkiss and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 70–74.
- 33 For these stylistic features, see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, pp. 131–84.
- 34 *Sancte Thoma, pridem puerum mihi reddidisti; cur ad maternum luctum reddere voluisti? Morbum, quo misere cruciabatur, curasti; vae mihi, quo nunc peccato, qua transgressione mandatorum, damnor orbitate? Redde, martyr sancte, etiam nunc quem reddidisti. Voto obnoxia, laneis induta, nudis pedibus abjecta, tuum repetam devota sepulcrum. Redde, martyr sancte, quem pridem reddidisti.* William of Canterbury, *Miracula*, pp. 229–30.
- 35 For this theme in Greek tragedy, see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, pp. 112–13, 178.
- 36 As in medieval exegesis. See e.g., William of Malmesbury, *Liber Super Explanationem Lamentationum Ieremie Prophetae*, ed. Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).
- 37 Tsagalis, *Epic Grief*, pp. 39–41.
- 38 *Aliis ridentibus ipsa flebat, aliis cantantibus ipsa lugebat. Historia miraculorum in circumlacione per Flandriam*, *Acta Sanctorum Bollandiana*, April 2, p. 576.
- 39 Loraux, *Mothers*, p. 35.

- 40 Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious and Philosophical Conceptions of Women's Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 54.
- 41 William of Canterbury, *Miracula*, p. 346.
- 42 William of Canterbury, *Miracula*, p. 483.
- 43 Aristotle, 'History of Animals', 608a33. See *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 1, IX.1, pp. 774–993, quotation at p. 949.
- 44 Stories employing the 'fountain of tears' motif (Jer. 9:1) include: Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 218, 282; Hugh Farsit, *Libellus de Miraculis B. Mariae Virginis in Urbe Suessionensi*, PL 179:1792–4; *Miracula Sancta Aetheldrethe Virginis*, ed. and tr. Rosalind C. Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 118.
- 45 *Miraculorum Sancte Marie*, p. 132.
- 46 *The Book of St Gilbert*, ed. and tr. Raymonde Foreville and Gillian Keir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 330; Benedict of Peterborough, *Miracula*, p. 41. For women's intercessory role in medieval society see e.g., Sharon Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives', *Speculum* 61 (1986), pp. 538–43.
- 47 For this theme, see e.g., Gay Ord Pollock Lynch, 'Why do your Eyes not Run like a River? Ritual Tears in Ancient and Modern Greek Funerary Traditions', in Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (eds), *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 67–82.
- 48 *Miracula S Frideswidae*, ASS, October 8 (Antwerp, 1853), p. 572; *Miracula S Swithuni*, ed. and tr. Michael Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 652–4.
- 49 *Miraculorum Sancte Marie*, p. 252. For the lament of cities, see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, pp. 83–101. Biblical precedents can be found in the Psalms and Lamentations; classical ones in Euripides' 'Trojan Women', mentioned above.
- 50 *Miraculorum Sancte Marie*, pp. 122, 144, 190–92, 166 respectively.
- 51 *Vox in excelso audita est lamentationis flectus et luctus; Rachael plorantis filios suos*. ('A voice is heard on high of lamentation, weeping and grieving, of Rachael lamenting her children'.) Jer. 31:15. For Rachel in the

- plancus* genre, see Boynton, 'The Lament of Rachel', pp. 319–27.
- 52 One example reads: *Materne pietatis lacrimae celos attingerent*. ('The tears of the mother's piety reached the heavens'.) Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles*, p. 208. Note the allusion to Rachel whose laments were heard 'on high' (*in excelso*).
- 53 See e.g., Hildegard von Bingen, *Causae et curae*, ed. Paul Kaiser (Leipzig: B. G. Teubnerus, 1903), pp. 94, 105, 121.
- 54 E.g., *Miracula S Frideswidae*, p. 571.
- 55 Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 282. The account is modelled on the apocryphal penitent, Mary of Egypt, as is a similar story in *Miracula S Frideswidae*, pp. 578–9.
- 56 The noise is described by Alexiou as 'a shrill cry' or 'inarticulate wailing'. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, p. 102.
- 57 Euripides, 'Trojan Women', line 1305; Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1992), p. 2.
- 58 *The Miracles of the Hand of St James*, tr. Brian Kemp, *Berkshire Archaeological Journal* 65 (1970), p. 15.
- 59 *Miraculorum Sancte Marie*, p. 228; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum*, p. 650.
- 60 Benedict of Peterborough, *Miracula*, p. 118.
- 61 Benedict of Peterborough, *Miracula*, pp. 188, 228.
- 62 *Miracula S Ivonis*, ed. William D. Macray, Rolls Series 83 (London, 1886), p. lxxix.
- 63 Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 154–5, 208, 226–7, 229, 243.
- 64 *Miraculorum Sancte Marie*, p. 150.
- 65 E.g., Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, p. 6.
- 66 Paul Binski, *Medieval Death and Representation* (London: British Museum, 1996), p. 52; Lansing, *Passion*, pp. 86–8; Jan M. Ziolkowski, 'Laments for Lost Children: Latin Traditions', in Tolmie and Toswell, *Laments*, pp. 99–100.
- 67 *Miracula Sancti Erkenwaldi*, p. 122.
- 68 *Mes de duel feire estoit si fole*. Chrétien, *Yvain*, line 1150.

- 69 *vultu, gestu ac voce dolorem insinuans, coelom clamoribus implet. Vestimenta dirumpit, crinem distrabit, arat unguibus ora, atque sibi minibus mortem consciscere tentat; nunc procumbit humi. Miracula S Ivonis*, p. lxxix.
- 70 See e.g., Jan N. Bremmer, 'Greek Maenadism Reconsidered', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 55 (1984), pp. 267–86.
- 71 Euripides, *The Bacchae*, tr. Geoffrey S. Kirk (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), line 688.
- 72 Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pp. 27–8. Jan Bremmer discusses the relationship between Euripides' 'myth' and ritual reality in Bremmer, 'Greek Maenadism'. For the 'Dionysaic cry' see Bremmer, 'Greek Maenadism', pp. 279–80 and *Bacchae*, lines 24, 149, 791.
- 73 *Bacchae*, lines 665, 1122–8, 300.
- 74 For example, see n. 79, below.
- 75 Snakes are also associated with the maenads in Euripides' play. Bremmer, 'Greek Maenadism', pp. 268–9. For demonic possession, see T. K. Oesterreich, *Possession: Demoniactal and Other* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930; repr. London: Routledge, 1999).
- 76 Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles*, pp. 226–7.
- 77 Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles*, p. 281.
- 78 Lansing, *Passion*, pp. 117–20; Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, pp. 28–33.
- 79 PL 59.346.
- 80 For the Christianisation process, see Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 81 Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, PL 140.838; *Miracula S Swithuni*, p. 676.
- 82 See e.g., Robert Garland, 'The Well-Ordered Corpse: An Investigation into the Motives behind Greek Funeral Legislation', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 36 (1989), pp. 1–15; Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Lansing, *Passion*.
- 83 Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles*, p. 42.
- 84 Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, p. 42. Notably, he includes women.
- 85 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow: Longman,

- 86 See e.g., André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, tr. J. Birrel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). The work of Caroline Walker Bynum is especially renowned in this respect: see n. 101 below.
- 87 Jacques de Vitry, ‘The Life of Marie D’Oignies’, tr. Margot H. King, in *Two Lives of Marie D’Oignies* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1998), pp. 640–41. See also Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, tr. George Lamb (London: Harvill Press, 1960); *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, ed. and tr. Roger de Ganck (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991).
- 88 Raymond, *Catherine*, pp. 107, 203, 221, 193. For other examples, see *The Life of Margaret of Ypres*, tr. Margot H. King (Toronto: Peregrina, 1999), pp. 651, 652; *Vita Lutgardis Acta Sanctorum Bollandiana*, June 16 (1867), p. 245; Thomas de Cantimpré, *The Life of Christina the Astonishing*, tr. Margot H. King (Toronto: Peregrina, 1999), p. 70.
- 89 Raymond, *Catherine*, pp. 40, 182–3. For other examples, see *Margaret of Ypres*, p. 660; *Beatrice*, p. 116; *Marie D’Oignies*, p. 660; *Lutgardis*, p. 253.
- 90 *Plus clamavit quam de aliquot praecedentium. Christina*, p. 82.
- 91 Santha Bhattacharji, ‘Tears and Screaming: Weeping and the Spirituality of Margery Kempe’, in Patton and Hawley (eds), *Holy Tears*, pp. 229–54, here p. 233; *Marie D’Oignies*, pp. 641, 662.
- 92 Raymond, *Catherine*, p. 170; *Marie D’Oignies*, p. 640.
- 93 *Marie D’Oignies*, p. 663.
- 94 The ritual movements in ancient Greek lament are also said to ‘have resembled a dance’. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, p. 104.
- 95 *Beatrice*, p. 232; *Lutgardis*, p. 240.
- 96 Hadewijch, ‘Visions’, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, tr. Mother Columba Hart (London: SPCK, 1981), pp. 280, 302, 263, 284; 304–5.
- 97 *Beatrice*, p. 308.
- 98 Barbara Newman, ‘Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century’, *Speculum* 73 (1998), pp. 733–70, here p. 763.
- 99 *Christina*, pp. 28, 30–6, 58, 60.

- 100 For this theme, see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 2003).
- 101 See e.g., Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (London: University of California Press, 1982); Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages, in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 181–238; Caroline Walker Bynum, 'And Woman His Humanity: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages', in Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman (eds), *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986), pp. 257–88.
- 102 E.g., Walker Bynum states that the distinctive female piety of the later period first appeared in the thirteenth century. Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation*, pp. 57–8.

Architecture of Desire: Mediating the Female Gaze in the Medieval English Anchorhold

Michelle M. Sauer

Anchorites and anchoresses were an important part of pre-Reformation Christianity across western Europe, but especially in England. Many individuals turned towards the eremitical life in order to secure their own salvation, and many others were eager to support these individuals in order to increase their own chances of redemption. Although the origins of the term can be traced back to the Egyptian Desert Fathers, in medieval England, ‘anchorite’ addressed a specific vocation that included vows, though formal clerical profession was unnecessary. The three anchoritic vows were chastity, obedience and ‘stude stedeleustenesse’, or stability of abode. The last is a unique vow among religious professions, as anchorites did not only promise to remain enclosed, but also agreed to remain in one singular location, completely closed off from the world. Thus, architecture becomes an immediate part of the actual vocational parameters of anchoritism.

Before embarking on the life of a recluse, the prospective anchoress had to secure permission from her bishop.¹ The candidate's spiritual veracity was tested alongside her financial stability. Once incarcerated, the anchoress became dependent upon her saved financial resources, money from her family, gifts from ‘spiritual children’ and the largesse of the community as a whole. The anchoritic vocation drew from all social classes, with several instances of peasant class anchoresses being recorded. Nevertheless, most of the surviving evidence surrounding medieval anchoresses reveals the apparent wealth of many of the women, and the majority of them had a servant to attend to daily needs. Moreover, the anchoress was expected to be literate, at least in the vernacular. She was supposed to read and understand her ‘rule’, and also to read and emulate hagiographies and other spiritually edifying texts.

After securing the requisite permissions, the potential recluse then underwent a ‘burying ceremony’, symbolising her worldly death. After this ceremony, which often included at least a portion of the Requiem Mass, the anchoress was then solemnly enclosed in her cell. After receiving the Last Rites, the entrance was barred and the curtains drawn. The cell became a metaphorical tomb in which the rest of the anchoress's physical life would be spent.

Although no set discipline was enforced, since anchorites did not belong to a specific religious order, a number of guidebooks exist that had been created for various individuals or small groups. Of these, *Ancrene Wisse*, or *Guide for Anchoresses*, is a thirteenth-century text that for many years has been held up as the template for the anchoritic discipline, particularly for female practitioners.² In it, alongside the prayers and devotions, the structure of the anchoritic cell is outlined. It includes a parlour, a sleeping room and several windows, one of which is the squint. Although not described in full, the squint is defined as a window that provides viewing access to the high altar and the consecration (Mass) without causing the anchoress to leave her cell or expose herself in any way. Those latter two points are crucial: the anchoress *must* be able to see the consecration, and she must also *not* be seen by others, especially men. Sight, both seeing and being seen, becomes the operative function of her devotion.

Although the reality of the anchoritic cell is somewhat different from the idealised version presented in *Ancrene Wisse*, the anchorhold was usually attached to a church and employed other windows besides the squint for necessities. These windows served various other functions, such as allowing light into the cell, allowing food to be passed in and slops to be passed out, allowing gifts to be received and allowing conversation between anchoress and visitor. This last window, the ‘conversation window’, was either between the anchoress's parlour and receiving room, if the cell was elaborate, or simply opened between the cell and the churchyard if the cell was simple. The window was covered by a heavy black curtain with white crosses sewed into it, allowing light in the form of a crucifix to enter, and serving as yet another reminder of Christ's constant presence. The anchoress controlled access to this window, and thus to herself, by controlling the curtain. In essence, this was a ‘safe space’ for both speech and sight. The anchoress was supposed to offer counsel and prayers; that numerous Rules contain admonitions not to gossip through this window demonstrates both a fear of women's speech and sight, and hints at common window violations. Nevertheless, the anchoress's ‘visiting hours’, her gifts and her prayers were all aided by the actual structure of the cell and its window, making the physical parameters a tangible part of her devotional calling.

Anchoritic architecture is related to the vocation in a complex manner. More than simply being suitable for the necessary functions of the lifestyle, the actual structure of the cell assumes an important place in the vocation itself. Just as the literal cell is fused to the church building which houses the body of Christ, the anchorite and cell become fused into one inseparable dwelling place for the Lord. Once built, the cell became the anchorite's, and was often willed to servants upon death. Moreover, not only was the cell built specifically for her and controlled by her, but it also became conceptually fused with her body. The physical anchorhold was conceived as an extension

of the anchoress's body.

Darlene Brooks-Hedstrom outlines the Egyptian monastic tradition upon which this was based, which in turn references 1 Peter 2: 5 wherein the faithful are likened to living stone.³ She writes, 'the belief that a lived space, such as the cell, had the ability to shape the monastic individual...is an illustration of Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*'.⁴ Bourdieu asserts that actions create memories within a social space.⁵ This in turn aligns with Henri Lefebvre's spatial concepts. He suggests that representations of space are performances of sorts.⁶ As he explains, 'the lived, conceived, and perceived realms [of space] should be interconnected, so that the "subject"...may move from one to another without confusion'.⁷ Brooks-Hedstrom further explains, 'performative rituals led to an internalisation of the cell within the heart and mind of the monk'.⁸ In this way, the monk's physical cell is absorbed into his being, much as the anchorhold in medieval England becomes part of the anchoress herself, and, as Brooks-Hedstrom further clarifies, places 'become particular *spaces* only when individuals become engaged with that space'.⁹ The material structure of the anchorhold must work in tandem with the guides and practices to construct and shape the individual inside.

The intersection of archaeology and gender – their mutual interaction – constructs the space within the anchorhold. Elizabeth Grosz invites us to consider applying Deleuzian concepts to architecture, dubbing this process 'architecture from the outside', and basing it on Deleuze's assertion, 'something in the world causes us to think'. Thinking involves wrenching concepts away from their usual configurations, or, in this case, forcing an encounter between gender constructs and architectural structures to produce a reading of the anchoritic space, which is simultaneously a church building and the anchorite's body. Grosz asks, 'Can architecture inhabit us as much as we see ourselves inhabiting it?'¹⁰ That question lies at the heart of the medieval anchoritic vocation. In a spiritual sense, the anchoress did not exist *in* a place; rather, she *was* the space. With female anchoresses, the cell and body are fused in a unique way, as noted in *Ancrene Wisse*:

Yes, you, too will go out of both your anchorhouses as he [Jesus] did, without a break, and leave them both whole. That will be when the spirit goes out in the end, without break or blemish, from its two houses. One of them is the body, the other is the outer house, which is like the outer wall around a castle.¹¹

Here the anchorhold is specifically tied to the status of the anchoress's hymen. Her physical purity assures the spatial purity of the cell. Anything that pollutes her pollutes the space, just as anything used to control and purify her keeps the space controlled and purified. That the cell is attached to a church, making it an inherently sacred space, yet simultaneously an extension of the corrupted female body, presents a complex set of issues. Lynda Coon

examines a similar phenomenon in Carolingian monastic society. Several monastic writers ‘ask the monks to ponder how their own bodies relate to the spaces in which they move’.¹² The monks equate space with body, and body with space. Intriguingly, the spaces they inhabit are both masculine and feminine. For instance, the dark, open space of the lower church is ‘feminine’, but the activities performed within it are masculinised and ritualised, negating the feminine presence, and restoring virile masculinity. This is one way that feminine space can be conquered.

Anchoritic cells present a similar problem. As extensions of the body of the inhabitant, they are gendered spaces, and are feminine in nature. In this essay, I will examine one specific facet of the anchorhold as a gendered materiality – the squint. Since many cells were built behind the rood screen, beyond the point penetrated by the layperson's view, I suggest that female-occupied cells required modification of sight due to the polluting quality of the female gaze, especially since in the Middle Ages sight is connected to sexuality and lust. The windows of the cell stand for the windows of the anchoress's body, her eyes. Numerous medieval theological texts, including most anchoritic rules, cite the passage in Jeremiah regarding sight: ‘death is come up through our windows, it is entered into our houses to destroy the children from without, the young men from the streets’.¹³ Lust, lechery, temptation and sexual transgression – all were assumed to stem from sight and the lecherous female gaze. Of course as a woman living in a cell attached to a church, the anchoress's gaze was always present within the sacred space. I believe that in order to mitigate this problem, anchoritic cells constructed specifically for women relied upon cruciform squints as a method of purifying and controlling the anchoritic gaze. When cruciform squints were not employed, other methodologies of filtering the female gaze were used instead. In each case, however, controlling the sense of sight was crucial to retaining the spiritual purity of the church and the cell alike.

Mechanics of medieval sight

The science of optics has long been tied to medieval morality and social codes. Early work on optics, such as the *De proprietatibus rerum* of Bartholomaeus Anglicus (before 1203–1272 CE; compiled c.1230), suggested that the eyes were crucial in moral development because they occupy the space in the body closest to the soul. He also emphasises the preeminence of sight in the hierarchy of senses: ‘sight is keener and more vivid than the other senses...also, it is more important than all the other senses’.¹⁴ Thus not only is sight the sense most concerned with morality and spiritual development, but also it is the most important of the ‘Five Wits’. Bartholomaeus's work paved the way for later treatises on sight and spirituality. Similarly, Robert Grosseteste (c.1175–1253) bettered the status of the science of optics by claiming it as the basis of all natural philosophy. In his work *De luce*,

Grosseteste writes, 'The first corporeal form which some call corporeity is in my opinion light', and of course, it is from this original form that all others originate.¹⁵ Sight is preeminent not only because of its location, then, but also because of its fundamental nature.

The study of optics reached a zenith in the thirteenth century, spurred on by the incursion of texts from the Arabic world, especially the work of Alhazen (c.965–c.1039 CE), an Arab scientist. He proposed a visual theory of intramission, meaning sight depended upon an object sending 'rays' to the viewer's eyes. This object could, of course, be sacred or profane. Thus, as noted by Michael Camille, intramission 'placed the world of nature and the world of art on the same footing, as objects of sense, bringing the outside world within'.¹⁶ These ideas were especially formative in the works of the so-called 'perspectivists', the Franciscan scientists Roger Bacon (c.1214–1294 CE; *Opus majus*, 1267 CE) and John Pecham (c.1230–1292 CE; *Perspectiva communis*, c.1277–79 CE). Based on Roger Bacon's idea that vision is not completed in the eyes, but rather elsewhere in the mind and body – like leaving an imprint in sealing wax – Camille further states, 'the activity of the vision, [should be] understood not as a passive process but as an active one involving the body and the whole person'.¹⁷ Essentially, vision involves the replication of (a form of) an image of the viewed object within the body and mind of the viewer. Bacon regarded the active visual force as an extension of the embodied soul: 'As an organ of the soul, the eye "passes over the separate points of a visible object", "grasp[s] its surface and contain[s] its extremities"'.¹⁸ Thus, in medieval discourses, the eye is eroticised as both an organ of penetration as well as a penetrated orifice.

Bacon and Pecham in turn inspired the most widely popularised text on moralised optical theory, Peter of Limoges's *De Oculo Morali* (composed between 1275/6 and 1289).¹⁹ Limoges's text takes the theory of intramission and creates a preachers' manual in which control over the senses, especially sight, is desired. In fact, he merges the ideas of corporeal sight and the bodily eye (*oculo corporis*) with spiritual sight and the mind's eye (*oculo mentis*) repeatedly, implying that physical vision can be spiritually determining. Limoges warns against gazing upon damaging objects while suggesting proper objects to gaze upon. For instance, he specifically urges looking at Christ's wounds in order that the viewer may imitate the suffering of Christ.²⁰ Interestingly, the medieval phenomenon of *imitatio Christi* shares a number of basic principles with Bacon's optics, most importantly the conviction that sight entails a physical transformation of the spectator.²¹ Visual interactions with Christ imprinted and altered the viewer. That means that while negative viewing produced dire consequences, positive viewing produced positive consequences. In these terms, controlling a female anchoress's viewing was an absolutely necessary part of her salvation. Shaping that gaze to include some aspect of Christ himself, such as directing her look through a cruciform

shaped squint, would have been particularly edifying.

The dangers of sight

Sight is not only the preeminent sense, but also it is the most dangerous because the eye is both penetrated and penetrating. The anchoritic rules recognise this dual nature of sight and take precautions. Clearly, the anchoress must be allowed and even encouraged to look at Jesus, her spouse and beloved, and to participate in ocular communion. However, there is also danger associated with looking, and the major threat is to her chastity.

Ocular desires, both spiritual and secular, pervade medieval texts, from preachers' manuals to courtly love poetry. Sight is processed by the human eye 'as an orifice *as well as* an active organ of the sensitive soul, the eye was doubly transgressive of corporeal and architectural borders'.²² Sight is a phenomenological encounter with visual surfaces. It is a tool used to acquire knowledge, but it is also the root of carnal desire. James Baldwin notes, 'twelfth century physicians assigned to the eyes an important role in the arousal of sexual desire', and this view persisted throughout the later Middle Ages.²³ More specifically, Salernitan-period doctors defined the essence of sexual pleasure as arising 'from the outside', operating through the means of 'appropriate instruments' including the eyes and the optic nerve.²⁴ Sight was dangerous as well as exciting. Edward Wheatley observes that 'the majority of instances of blinding as punishment for sexual transgression came from England', which makes the dangers of sight particularly central to English devotion.²⁵ The standard punishment for rape, especially of a virgin, in the twelfth century was having one's eyes put out.²⁶ Blinding was considered a more permanent end to an over-active libido as well as being a political punishment often meted out for treason.²⁷ It was a distinctly gendered punishment. In many cases, blinding and castration were coupled, rendering the traitor both impotent and emasculated in more than one way – eyesight is necessary to create desire, and the genitals are required to enact desire, so without both, the punished man is permanently feminised and made dependent.

The most famous love manual of the Middle Ages confirms this attitude. In *The Art of Courtly Love*, Andreas Capellanus defines love as deriving from the sight of and the excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex. He then goes on to say, 'blindness is a bar to love, because a blind man cannot see anything upon which his mind can reflect immoderately, and so love cannot arise in him'.²⁸ Sight engendered concupiscence, a view echoed by sacred and secular texts alike. Women were thought to incite desire in men simply by allowing men to see them, and potentially compounded this 'sin' by enjoying being a spectacle.²⁹ Looking at a woman invited sin as much as it was a sin.³⁰ Basil, for instance, does not necessarily suggest a special

enclosure for women, but does have explicit regulations against private conversations between monks and nuns, which could lead to imprudence both because of the close proximity, and because of the mutual gazes. In this instance, both space and sight work together to create an atmosphere of temptation.³¹

There is, then, a clear connection between the gaze and sexuality; yet, as A. C. Spearing points out, sight has a 'unique status among the senses as the only one that involves no material contact with its object', which interestingly leads to his conclusion that sight 'gives least satisfaction to bodily desire'.³² The paradox is revealed – sight is both reliable and unfaithful, both fulfilling and unsatisfying, but always interactive. Due to its precarious balance, the sense of sight was especially vulnerable to pollution. Because of the dual nature of sight – it can be a shared or a solitary experience – it is central to fantasy and voyeurism.³³ Sight simultaneously encourages danger and pleasure, and in the anchoritic world pleasure included being a participant in the Mass and enjoying a constant view of the heavenly spouse. Moreover, Christ was the central object of devotion and fantasy in the cell.

Aside from all the potential avenues for lust, the female gaze was also problematic because of latent impurity and the potential to pass that impurity on. There was, for instance, a certain fear of the menstruating woman's gaze. The rather infamous *De Secritis Mulierum* from the thirteenth century indicates that a menstrual woman was considered 'venomous by virtue of her very physiological mechanism', and that such women poisoned children, tarnished mirrors and caused men to lose their voice simply by proximity.³⁴ Even post-menopausal women were not exempt from leaking this poison. It was thought that when women could no longer exude the poison through the bloody discharge, that the vapours were released solely from the eyes.³⁵ The female gaze was a dangerous thing.

Furthering this dangerous discourse, in medieval theological discussions, vision was explicitly connected to the Fall, making it the source of Original Sin as well as a particularly feminised temptation. Eve was seduced and entranced more by the look of the plump, juicy fruit of the Tree of Knowledge than the serpent's words: 'And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband, who did eat'.³⁶ This is the origin of the medieval desiring gaze – Eve's first sight of the fruit that brings about the death of humankind. As theologians opined, 'Eve would not have touched the tree had she not first gazed upon it heedlessly'.³⁷ A number of anchoritic texts pick up on this exact concern. *Ancrene Wisse*, for instance, notes, 'sight went before [all sin] and made a way for harmful desire...this apple, dear sister, symbolises all the things that desire and the delight of sin turn to'.³⁸ Window violations and uncontrolled gazing were the bane of the anchoritic vocation, and serious sins. Incorrect looking was a slippery slope, leading to all sorts of

other sins, particularly sexual ones. As the *Myroure of Recluses* points out, ‘O what great care is asked of you and required for the keeping of the sense of sight, which imprisons and imprints on the heart of the person who has beheld and seen...and which engenders concupiscence of the flesh and nurtures bodily lusts that cause a person to act wickedly’.³⁹ This passage ably connects to Bacon's optical theory of intramission.

The text goes on to list the destructive effects of uncontrolled gazing, although here the focus is on women allowing themselves to be seen, not necessarily doing the seeing. The text asks, ‘didn't Sampson see Delilah before he fell? Didn't the sight of Bathsheba destroy David?’ before finishing with, ‘what made our mother Eve sin except the alluring look of the prohibited and forbidden tree?’⁴⁰ Here the warning is more directed towards men looking at women – or, rather, at women allowing themselves to be seen by men, thereby tempting them. Numerous theologians wrote about the dangers of looking and lust. Gerald of Wales, for instance, in the aptly-named chapter entitled ‘On not staring at women’, writes, ‘Just as one should avoid the company of women, so too should one avoid staring at them or being stared at by them’.⁴¹ Here Gerald cites the dangers of being both the subject of and the object of the desiring gaze as troubling. Men should not stare at women too much, but neither should they allow women to stare at them. Either activity leads down a lust-filled path. Other texts, such as Grimaic's *Rule for Solitaries*, echo these sentiments with additional caveats: ‘They [solitaries] must refrain not only from private talks with women, but also from seeing or touching them... and so [to avoid carnal desire] they must avoid frequently looking at women. This applies especially to those who had lived among seculars or who had been married’.⁴² Sight clearly leads to lust in this instance, and even more so for the solitary who ‘knows what he's missing’. Grimaic's implication here is that the ‘experienced’ monk will glimpse a woman, and then superimpose her image onto his lustful, and apparently accurate, thoughts.

The texts for anchoresses are even more explicit about the dangers of peeping from one's windows. Since women were by nature more inclined to lust and lechery, or so the medieval Church taught, then they were also more susceptible to the dangers of sight. The anchoritic texts are concerned with both looking out and looking in, both seeing and being seen. *Holy Maidenhood*, a thirteenth-century treatise on virginity composed for an anchoritic audience, states: ‘Her [Lechery's] first ally is sight. If you look often and pointedly at any man, lechery with that readies herself at once to make war on your maidenhood, and first advances upon her face-to-face’.⁴³ In other words, if an anchoress looks at a man, she will be overcome by the temptation to engage in sexual relations. Aelred of Rievaulx, in his *Rule*, warns of the opposite, at least as far as men are concerned: ‘the recluse’, he writes, ‘should always have her face veiled when speaking with a man; she should avoid looking at him’.⁴⁴ Aelred also warns the anchoress against being

swayed by lust at the sight of a crying girl, and then kissing her, just as *Ancrene Wisse* warns, ‘some have been tempted by their own sisters’.⁴⁵ Goscelin of St Bertin enjoins Eve, the recluse to whom he is writing, ‘let the windows of your cell [be locked against falsity]’, while encouraging her to avoid looking at men, and instead turn her sight to the crucifix and religious texts.⁴⁶ *Ancrene Wisse* devotes a goodly portion of Part 2: The Outer Senses, to explicit and lengthy warnings on the dangers of peeping as well as allowing people to look inside the anchorhold. Overall, anchoresses are instructed to ‘love your windows as little as you possibly can’.⁴⁷ As Linda Georgianna observes, ‘because an anchoress’s eyes are connected to her heart, no external act [of looking] can remain unconnected to her inner life. Looking, though seemingly innocuous...can abruptly become leaping in this tiny but concentrated spiritual landscape’.⁴⁸ The confines of the cell heighten both the temptation and the responsibility for its inhabitant. Further, in *Ancrene Wisse*, the anchoresses are directed to cover their windows with heavy black cloth into which a white cross has been sewn. As a pure spouse of Christ the white cross ‘belongs to’ the anchoress, serves as a reminder of her purity and her spouse, and allows a sunlit cross to fall across the floor of the cell itself. The presence of the cruciform shape in the cell is transformative and redemptive, and can compensate for the anchoress’ impure gaze.

Redeeming sight

Of course sight is dangerous, but the anchoress, permanently enclosed in a cell attached to the church, is also expected to participate in the spiritual life of the parish. She, like the lay congregation, relied heavily upon a practice called ocular communion. Because the laity was neither encouraged nor allowed to participate in daily or even weekly communion, various ‘proxies’ for communion were developed, such as kissing the *pax*, eating ‘Sunday bread’ at home, and, most significantly, participating in ocular communion. Ocular communion is the idea that viewing the elevated host at the exact moment of consecration – at the moment of the miracle of transformation – is congruent with consuming the host itself. Ocular communion grew significantly in popularity after 1200. As a practice, it rewarded seeing: one sees the host and then receives the benefits as if it were consumed: ‘Here, at a distance, divine grace flowed into the eyes of the beholder, emptying their soul of vice and refilling it with virtue as a spiritual communion of heavenly food’.⁴⁹ Both the elevation and the actual sight were crucial to the experience. While initially ocular communion proved a popular and achievable proxy for the physical ingestion of the host, changes in the liturgy and practices of the later medieval Church made the rite of communion, even in its ocular form, less accessible to the laity.

Churches of the high Middle Ages occasionally employed an openwork wall-like screen, called a rood screen, separating the chancel and choir area, and

thus the altar, from the nave, which catered to the laity and sometimes to secular functions. As Robert Whiting notes, ‘by excluding most of the laity from the chancel, and by distancing it spatially from the high altar, the rood screen thus emphasised the elevated status of the priest and the exalted nature of the mass’.⁵⁰ Therefore objects or individuals who inhabited the space beyond the rood screen became elevated by association and action. Such screens became especially popular in the late thirteenth, throughout the fourteenth, and into the fifteenth centuries. Before this time period, the altar area might have employed a curtain, a moveable screen, or other such measures to secure the sacrament. This was especially important after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required clergy to keep reserved sacrament inviolate.

As rood screens grew more common and in some sense almost necessary, those closed off from the ritual strove make certain of their ability to witness the elevation of the host. Kate Giles observes that this urge ‘was facilitated through a range of strategies, including the piercing and creation of peepholes in screens and squints through side walls to provide the laity with views of the High, or other subsidiary, altars’.⁵¹ This has led to some interesting architectural configurations. For instance, Holy Trinity Church in Long Melford, Suffolk has a small squint cut right through a pillar near the Lady Chapel. Because this squint is meant exclusively for the purposes of the laity viewing communion or activities beyond the rood screen, I suggest the term hagnoscope as more appropriate here than squint. Such viewing aids were more common in late medieval churches populated by wealthy congregants.

This church was reconstructed in the late fifteenth century (c.1467–84 CE) and is an excellent example of late Perpendicular Gothic architectural style as well as being a ‘wool church’. A wool church was financed by the wealthy wool merchants of the district, and the financiers took great pains to secure as clear a view as possible of the elevated host for themselves.⁵²

Anchoritic texts also hold out the possibility that physical sight, not just spiritual sight, is a positive thing. In the allegorical treatise *Sawles Warde*, when Love of Life, the Heavenly Messenger, appears, the castle dwellers let him in and ‘all feel relieved and cheered at the sight of him’.⁵³ This contrasts to the earlier reaction the household had when Fear, the messenger from Hell, arrived, bringing with him bold and vivid imagery of the horrors of hell. Upon learning that Love of Life was sent deliberately by Christ, ‘the household is thus made conscious that they are always in the sight of God’.⁵⁴ As an anchoress dwelling in a cell attached to a church, with a window looking out at the altar (ideally), the anchoress, too, would have been aware that she was always in the sight of her spouse, Jesus. Just as she could always look at him, he could always look at her. Because of this mutuality of vision, it was especially important that she guard her chastity. *Holy Maidenhood* clarifies the rewards of good living, noting that the virgin becomes pure and beautiful

in connection to her heavenly spouse: 'Blessed spouse of God, possess this same power [maidenhood with humility], so that you do not seem dark but shining as the sun in the eyes of your husband'.⁵⁵

There are several issues at hand here. First is the connection to light. Medieval optic theory, as noted above, justified itself by equating the study of sight and light with the essence of the divine. According to David C. Lindberg, then, in Grosseteste's opinion, the study of optics 'became not only legitimate, but obligatory' because it 'could reveal the essential nature of material reality' and of God.⁵⁶ The connection of light with God is significant here, not only because the anchoress becomes bright like the sun, but also because of the interplay of light within her cell. I have noted the existence of 'light windows' high above the confines of the dwelling space, where no-one could look in or out, but light could enter. In this way, the purity of the anchoress's gaze is preserved, while the cell still receives light, and by extension, God. Furthermore, the main window coverings of the cell are to consist of a black curtain with a white cross sewn into it. As pointed out earlier, this allows light to flood the cell in a cruciform shape. In this case, the light of God literally shapes the cell and the vision of the anchoress within it. The cruciform shape recalls the sacrifice of Christ and provides a tangible connection between God as light and the anchoress's cell.

Holy Maidenhood also notes the potential trouble with the female gaze. Not only could her look lure men into sexual sin, but also it could be impure or venomous. Both of these are troubling for an anchoress, who was a woman living in a small space attached to the church, often beyond the rood screen, and certainly within viewing distance of the host.⁵⁷ Thus, in order to mitigate potential danger brought about by this desiring female gaze, for the anchoress was certainly encouraged to actively desire her spouse, Jesus, the architectural boundaries of her cell had to be altered to accommodate both religious duty and religious salvation while preserving sanctity.

One way of achieving this goal was the act of sacramental seeing, defined by Bob Scribner as 'a visual experience and a pious action...essentially a form of the gaze, a prolonged, contemplative encounter with the holy figure represented...through a combination of eye contact and gestural appeal'.⁵⁸ Directives to behold a pious image, or the crucifix, or a relic fall into this category. As I have argued elsewhere, this would also include the performative function of the anchoritic rules, wherein the anchoress is directed to imagine her holy spouse while performing certain gestures.⁵⁹ Furthermore,

as an object of devotion and fantasy, the body of Christ assumes a central place in the anchoress's cell. Particularly, it serves to remind the anchoress of her commitment to her heavenly spouse, but also serves as a proper outlet for her redirected [carnal] desires...the anchoritic gaze is even more

specifically directed towards a suffering Christ.⁶⁰

Anchoritic prayers such as those in the Wooing Group direct the anchoress to rectify 'bad' looks with 'good' ones. For instance, the anchoress's admission that 'mis i looked' [evilly, I looked; l. 24], in *The Song of Love to Our Lord*, is followed by an extensive *blazon* of Christ's suffering body. Elsewhere in the Wooing Group, his beauty, grace and handsome body are explicated. Similarly, *Holy Maidenhood* details Christ's attractiveness as one of his many husbandly qualities. In short, the anchoress is expected to dwell upon and fantasise about both the attractive beautiful risen Christ and the broken Man of Sorrows.⁶¹

Scribner notes the conflation of elevated host, risen Christ, and crucifix as well. He sees the crucifix as the 'condensation of this sacred truth [the sacrificial death]', noting that various images of the crucifix overlap with the moment of elevation – the crucifix behind the altar, the embroidered crucifixes on altar and priestly vestments, the various windows behind the altar, crucifixes on paintings or woven into altar screens and rood screens, and even the bodily position of the celebrant, standing with outstretched arms.⁶² Ritual action and image connect in the sacramental experience, allowing vision to play a central role in the most significant moment of the Mass. This is the moment in which the anchoress participates during her ocular communion experience. To this overall tableau, then, I would add that anchoritic cells constructed for women therefore have a need for cruciform squints over those of other shapes.

The actual view afforded by squints was an important factor in gendering the anchorhold. The squint is an aperture, usually oblique, affording a view of an altar. It allows the occupant to participate in the Mass, and is specially designed to see out without others seeing inside. One of the central privileges of the vocation was the opportunity to participate in the Mass without leaving the cell, and even when Mass was not being held, the anchorite need only glimpse the tabernacle to be with Jesus; thus the exhortation found at the end of *The Wooing of Our Lord*, 'hwen þu art on eise carpe toward iesu' [when you are at ease, talk to Jesus] (ll. 650–52), becomes truly possible. Jesus was a constant physical as well as spiritual presence.⁶³ So important is the ability to see and to participate in ocular communion that a cell might be rejected or redesigned if the view is blocked too much. Rotha Mary Clay relates the story of Margaret Kirkby (Richard Rolle's disciple for whom *The Form of Living* was composed). She was allowed to move from Layton to Aynderby where, as related in her petition to Archbishop Thoresbury in January 1356/7, she 'may see and hear the solemn sacrament of the Lord's altar, which in her present place of enclosure she is unable to do, and to dispense her from her vow of dwelling perpetually at Laton'.⁶⁴ Dwelling in a cell without sight of the altar and tabernacle was unthinkable.

The tabernacle is a space of desire and a place of consumption. The anchoress is supposed to fix her gaze on her spouse, Jesus, longing for union with him. She must meditate on his body and his love for her. If the shape of the squint is cruciform, then her gaze is directly controlled by the outline of his (suffering) body.

This squint ([Figure 1](#)), found in the cell at St Nicholas's Church in Compton, Surrey, is cruciform in shape and accompanied by a 'prayer-desk', designed for the anchoress to kneel in front of. She receives constant ocular communion, in a manner not shared by laypeople. She consumes Christ physically, mentally, spiritually, visually and sexually. This echoes the injunctions in almost every Rule for the anchoress to have a crucifix inside her cell to aid her meditations, and in *Ancrene Wisse* to sew a white cross into the heavy black curtains covering her windows. In this way, any impurity in her gaze would be counteracted by looking through the body of Christ, more specifically, looking through the sacrificial body of Christ, which purifies and saves humanity.

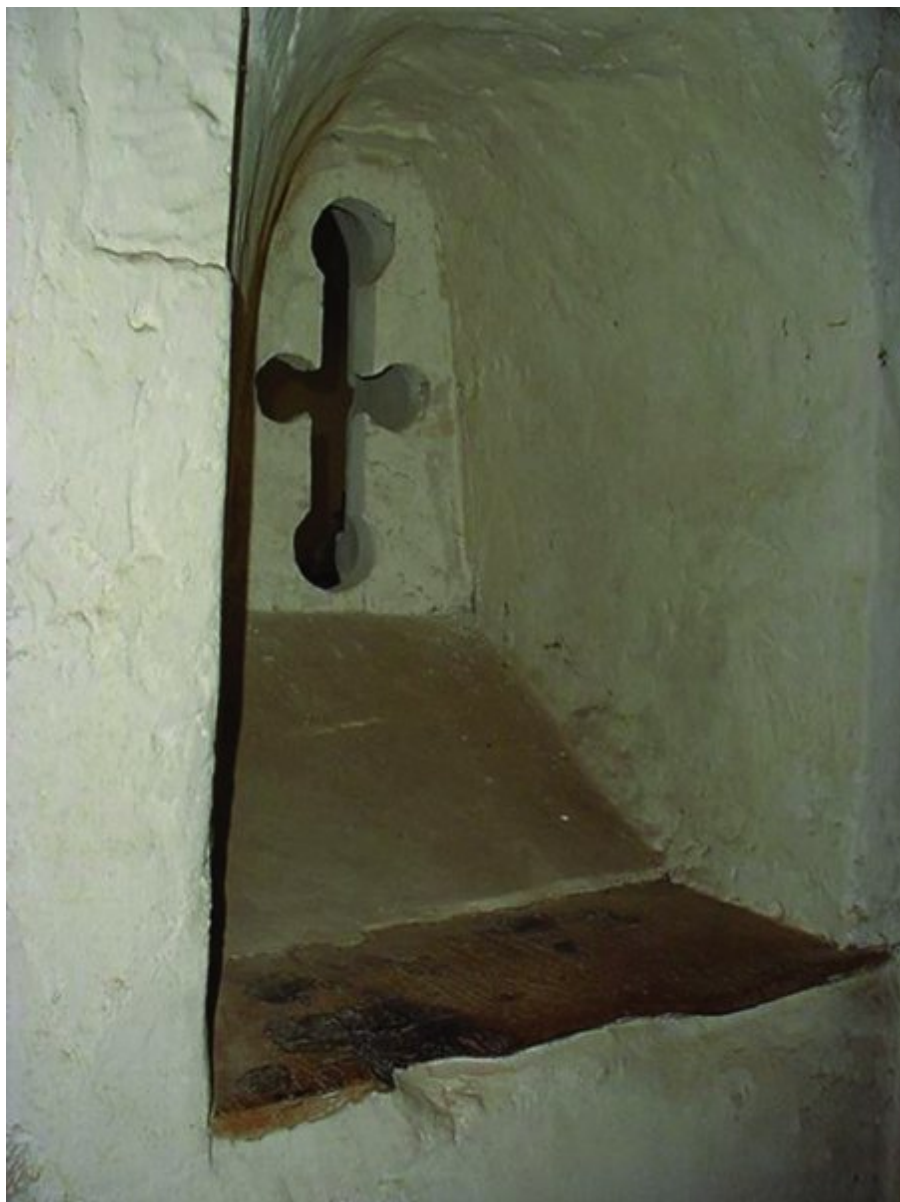


Figure 1: Cruciform squint in St Nicholas's Church, Compton, Surrey.

Another cruciform squint is found in St John the Baptist Church in Newcastle-on-Tyne (Figure 2). A document dating to 1260 CE confirms the existence of a female anchoress, Christiana Umfred.⁶⁵ The cell was probably two-storey, as the squint is 14 feet above the floor, and looks out over the high altar. In this case, the anchoress is removed to a physical location that is spatially farther away from the tabernacle, but allows for a wider field of vision in regards to the altar. The cruciform squint, once again, serves as a reminder that she must always look at the world through the body of Christ.

Furthermore, there are two smaller cruciform squints located on what would have been the side of the cell. I suggest these may have served as ways for the anchoress to receive communion and to give her confession. In both cases, the cruciform squint once again reminds her that Christ died for her sins (confession) and brought eternal life (Eucharist).



Figure 2: Cruciform squint in St John the Baptist's Church, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Yet another cruciform squint is found in St Mary of Charity Church in Faversham, Kent ([Figure 3](#)). In the Middle Ages, this cell would have had a

view, albeit a distant view, of the high altar.⁶⁶ In this case, I believe that both the cruciform squint and the physical distance from the high altar serve to mitigate the potential impurity a female body would have on the sacred space of the church. The anchoress's cell in this case is not located beyond the rood screen, but rather in the transept, away from the sacrament and the altar. Her gaze towards the altar and the consecration would then also have been filtered through the cruciform shape. That this is a deliberate placement for a female anchorite rather than a male anchorite is further suggested by the existence of a funeral brass for William Thornbury, who lived in a cell in the churchyard while the female recluse, unnamed, lived in the cell attached to the transept. His brass is located just in front of the altar, while she was buried in her cell.⁶⁷ She remains in death as she did in life – away from direct contact with the altar, yet in view of the tabernacle.



Figure 3: Cruciform squint in St Mary of Charity Church, Faversham, Kent.

Moreover, within the direct line of sight, is a painted pillar featuring scenes from the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary (Figure 4). Not only would the anchoress in this cell have had her gaze shaped by the crucifix, but also the edifying sight of scenes such as The Annunciation and The Visitation would have purified her gaze. Most significantly, however, the most prominent image on the side of the pillar directly across from her gaze was the Crucifixion. In this case, then, the anchoress's gaze outside her cell was always directed at Christ: through the cruciform squint, at the tabernacle and on the painted image. Each construct contributes to the control over lust and

lechery the anchoress would need to practice while looking out of her cell.



Figure 4: Painted pillar across from squint in St Mary of Charity's Church, Faversham, Kent.

Because of the special connection the anchoress had with her spouse, Christ, and the distinct connection between the suffering Christ and bodily purification, I suggest the cruciform squint was the easiest and most direct way of shaping the female anchoritic gaze into something pure and sacramental rather than lust inspiring. However, not all anchoritic cells had cruciform squints. Many cells were not built specifically for the inhabitant,

but rather were inherited from the former occupant. This could be especially tricky if the former inhabitant was male. Male anchorites, who were often priests as well, offered little threat to the Church order. They could see and celebrate Mass. Their bodies were not dangerous or polluting. Thus, their cells indicate a distinction between the secular and the spiritual, but need no mitigation.

If an anchoress inherited a cell previously occupied by a male anchorite, it is probable that the squint shape would be something other than cruciform in nature. Male-occupied cells often had simple rectangular openings, or chiselled angular squints. Other means of purification of the female gaze would then need to be employed. One such instance can be seen at St Botolph's Church in Hardham, Sussex. Here the cell was built for Prior Robert, about whom little is known beyond his name and sex. Upon his death, Robert willed his cell to an unnamed female disciple. When she took possession of the cell, it was presumably a concern to have a woman look out so boldly, through a rectangular window, directly onto the high altar. Some means of purifying her polluted female gaze needed to be employed. In this case, I suggest the presence of anchoritic wall paintings assisted in this process ([Figure 5](#)). Directly across from the cell is a painting of the life of St Catherine of Alexandria, of which her torture on the wheel can still be seen quite clearly. Catherine's life was especially important to anchoresses, as it forms the basis of the so-called Katherine Group of hagiographies meant for anchorites to read.⁶⁸ Surely this direct connection to the texts she was supposed to consume, alongside the ocular communion she was consuming, mitigated the potential danger in the anchoress's gaze.



Figure 5: Wall painting of St Catherine of Alexandria across from squint in St Botolph's Church, Hardham, Sussex.

Other cells employed additional physical means, such as bodily positioning, to control the female anchoritic gaze. The cell at the Church of St Mary and St Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street in County Durham has an extremely narrow view of a side altar. Though originally constructed for male anchorites, the cell was occupied by a succession of both male and female religious. The cell is kept away from the high altar, thus distancing the polluting female body from the consecrated hosts, and the view is extremely controlled. The narrow angular channel allows for only a small slice of the side altar to be seen – the tabernacle and crucifix, but not much else. In this way, the anchoress's gaze is firmly controlled and distanced. In another version of bodily control, the cell at St Anne's Church in Lewes, East Sussex would only have allowed the anchoress to kneel or lie down.

There is no way for her to have stood up within the confines of the cell. The time spent by the anchoress in her cell, gazing out at the altar, would be forcibly spent on her knees in a gesture of prayerful respect. Or, as Roberta Gilchrist explains, she would have been kneeling in her own grave: 'a female recluse was recorded in 1253...in order to view the high altar through the squint the recluse would have had to kneel daily in her own grave'.⁶⁹ Constant penitence would certainly have mitigated any polluting effects of the female gaze, and further caused her to unceasingly consider the suffering of Christ (Figure 6).



Figure 6: The grave in St Anne's Church, Lewes, East Sussex.

Architecture of desire

As Giles notes,

in recent years, archaeologists in the UK have become increasingly interested in the ways in which past spaces were actively used to structure particular senses of place, forms of identity, social relations and political power. It is this 'spatial turn' within the discipline that has prompted archaeologists to pay close attention to studying the visual relationships within and between past landscapes, buildings, and material culture.⁷⁰

Space syntax allows for examination of architectural structures within a socio/cultural/linguistic structure. In Sonit Bafna's terms, space syntax is an investigation of 'the relationship between human societies and space from the perspective of a general theory of the structure of inhabited space in all its diverse forms: buildings, settlements, cities, or even landscapes'.⁷¹ The demarcation of boundaries allows particular relationships of access or visibility to emerge among the component spaces, and this in turn generates patterns of movement and encounter within the population. Bafna continues: 'the primary object of analysis within space syntax research...is the configured space', meaning it considers relationships among spaces, movement within and between, and access patterns in order to discern the underlying spatiality, which in turn reflects the social organisation.

Spatial setting, as indicated by the vows the anchorites took, the literature they consumed and the devotional postures their bodies undertook, were central to the vocation. Moreover, by relying on this concept of space syntax, we can see that anchoritic gender extends beyond the realm of practice into the visual and literary culture of the Middle Ages. The fusion of body and cell is echoed in the overlap of the vision of the cell's inhabitant with the architectural form of the cell. The anchoritic imagination navigates through the literal and the figurative to preserve spiritual purity and negotiate gender, while simultaneously providing a network of sanctity important to medieval parish life. The anchoress's cell was a visible reminder of the holiness of the occupant, a stimulus to parish members for donation and prayer and possibly a space to receive spiritual guidance. Yet the occupant was not to be seen, nor was she supposed to look out. All aspects of the gaze were managed, and all dangers of feminine contamination were contained.

The eye and its by-product, sight, were both central to the anchoritic devotion, but were controlled by the physical parameters of the cell itself, especially the windows and squint. The squint was both exciting and dangerous for an anchoress and for her parish as well. Unlike the gift window and any other windows such as the servant's window or a slop window, the anchoress did not control access to the squint. For the other apertures, she had the power to draw her curtains at will, but no such curtain covered the squint. She was always exposed to Jesus, as pointed out by Aelred of Rievaulx: 'remember that he who searches hearts and reins is present and his eyes gaze upon whatever you are doing or thinking'.⁷² Or, as Bernard of Clairvaux cautions a potential anchoress, 'No one can censure the evil no one sees', but Jesus will always see the evil that is committed.⁷³ Such reminders are both comforting and ominous – the anchoress is never alone, but she is also under constant surveillance.

Furthermore, in space syntax, embedded visual cues – such as the shape and style of squints – can 'signal, or elicit, particular modes of behaviour'.⁷⁴ The squint controlled the direction of her gaze; the shape served as a continual reminder of the object of her gaze. As an aperture, like a camera lens, a change in it forces a change in perspective. Elsewhere I have argued that the anchoritic Christ is not only the crucified (Incarnated) Christ, but is particularly a pricked and penetrated Christ, thus forcing the view through a cruciform squint would not only be a constant reminder of her spouse and his sacrifice, but also serve as a reminder of the saving blood he shed – and is therefore evocative of the sacrament she receives visually.⁷⁵ Vision could provoke spiritual fervour. In fact, the anchoress was encouraged to imagine, to visualise the crucifixion: 'May my body hang with your body nailed upon the cross, enclosed transversely within four walls! And I will hang with you, nevermore to come off my cross until I die...Ah, Jesus, so sweet it is to hang with you!'⁷⁶ As Gilchrist points out, for the anchoress, 'space and behaviour

are mutually dependent'.⁷⁷ Spirituality, vision, dialogue, meditation and sacrament all converge in the space of the anchorhold, and the architectural configuration assures the purity of each.

Notes

- 1 Although the process was the same, essentially, for both male and female anchorites, I will here primarily use the term anchoress since the focus of my discussion is on the female practitioners of the vocation.
- 2 *Ancrene Wisse* is a vernacular prose treatise composed in the West Midlands dialect of Middle English, c.1225–40 CE (some scholars say as early as 1190). Four complete Middle English versions exist, along with fifteen other fragments, Latin versions and French version, indicating the relative popularity and significance of the work. In some of these versions, the basic text has been revised and adapted for a different audience, such as a larger community, a group of men, or even a Lollard community.
- 3 'Be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ'. Vulgate: 'et ipsi tamquam lapides vivi superaedificamini domus spiritualis sacerdotium sanctum offerre spiritalis hostias acceptabiles Deo per Iesum Christum'. See <<http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=0&b=1&c=3>> (accessed 20 May 2012).
- 4 Darlene L. Brooks-Hedstrom, 'The Geography of the Monastic Cell in Early Egyptian Monastic Literature', *Church History* 78 (2009), pp. 756–91, here p. 760.
- 5 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- 6 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 40–46.
- 7 Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 40.
- 8 Brooks-Hedstrom, 'Geography of the Cell', p. 762.
- 9 Brooks-Hedstrom, 'Geography of the Cell', p. 761.
- 10 Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 71.
- 11 *Ancrene Wisse*, part 6. In *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, ed. and tr. Nicholas Watson and Anne Savage (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 187.

- 12 Lynda Coon, *Dark Age Bodies* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 152.
- 13 Jeremiah 9: 21. Vulgate: 'quia ascendit mors per fenestras nostras ingressa est domos nostras disperdere parvulos de foris iuvenes de plateis'. See <<http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=0&b=1&c=3>> (accessed 20 May 2012).
- 14 Author's translation. Original: 'þe siȝt is more sotile and more lifliche þan þe opir wittis...Also he is more worþi þan opir wittis' (3.111). See Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum I*, tr. John Trevisa, ed. M. C. Seymour et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 15 Translated from the Latin by Clare C. Riedl (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1942); archived at 'Light Matters', Joost Rekvelde <http://www.lumen.nu/rekvelde/wp/?page_id=175> (accessed 5 June 2012).
- 16 Michael Camille, 'Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing', in Robert S. Nelson (ed.), *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 207.
- 17 Camille, 'Before the Gaze', p. 201.
- 18 Suzannah Biernoff, 'Carnal Relations: Embodied Sight in Merleau-Ponty, Roger Bacon, and St Francis', *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (2005), pp. 39–52, esp. pp. 47–48, citing Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, tr. Robert Belle Burke, 2 vols (New York: Russell, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 440, 468.
- 19 For an overview of this text, see Richard G. Newhauser, 'Peter of Limoges, Optics, and the Science of the Senses', *Sense and Society* 5 (2010), pp. 28–44.
- 20 See Peter of Limoges, *The Moral Treatise on the Eye*, tr. Richard Newhauser (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012).
- 21 Biernoff, 'Carnal Relations', p. 42.
- 22 Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 115.
- 23 John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 105.
- 24 Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, tr. Matthew Adamson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 130–31.

- 25 Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 154.
- 26 This correlates with idea of rape as a crime of power rather than sex, suggesting that the punishment of blinding is 'described as the result of the abuse of power'. See Genevieve Buehrer-Thierry, "'Just Anger" or "Vengeful Anger"? Punishment of Blinding in the Early Medieval West', in Barbara H. Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 75–91, here p. 77.
- 27 See Klaus van Eickels, 'Gendered Violence: Castration and Blinding as Punishment for Treason in Normandy and Anglo-Norman England', *Gender & History* 16 (2004), pp. 588–602; Tory Vandeventer Pearman, 'Refiguring Disability: Deviance, Blinding, and the Supernatural in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3 (2009), pp. 131–46. Pearman notes, 'legal authorities used blinding to punish not only sexual criminals but also those who threaten the king or his kingdom' (p. 139).
- 28 Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Love*, tr. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 33. For parallel texts in Latin and English, see *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. P. G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1983).
- 29 See e.g., Ambrose's *De Virginitate* (c.388–90 CE) and Tertullian's *On the Veiling of Virgins* (c.200 CE). See also Lynn Brumbaugh-Walter, "'The Grace of the Mutual Glance": Reciprocal Gazing and Unholy Voyeurism in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*', *Medieval Perspectives* 11 (1996), pp. 74–95; Janet Soskice, 'Sight and Vision in Medieval Christian Thought', in Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (eds), *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- 30 Early monastic Rules for women reflect this double-edged problem. Women needed to be completely enclosed, not only for their own safety and protection, but also for the security of men's souls. The earliest and one of the strictest Rules is that of Caesarius of Arles. He demanded complete isolation, even after death. Adalbert de Vogüé notes, 'according to these statutes, put together between 512 and 534 for the Monastery of St John at Arles, once a sister entered the monastery, she was never allowed to leave it, not even to attend the near-by secular basilica'. Adalbert de Vogüé, 'Caesarius of Arles and the Origin of Enclosure', *Word and Spirit* 11 (1989), pp. 16–29, here p. 16. In essence, these nuns were communally-dwelling anchoresses. Their virginity was crucial to their vocation, and

- separation from men and the world kept them pure. For a complete edition, see *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction*, tr. and ed. M. C. McCarthy (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1960).
- 31 Basil, *Reg.* 174 = *PR* 220 and following.
- 32 A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5.
- 33 I am using voyeurism here not in the narrow sense of a ‘peeping Tom’, or in the Freudian sense of ‘perversion’, but in the broader sense of observing actions, perhaps sexual in nature, that were generally assumed to be private, at least to some degree.
- 34 Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p. 75.
- 35 See Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, pp. 191–2.
- 36 Genesis 3: 6. Vulgate: ‘vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile et tulit de fructu illius et comedit deditque viro suo qui comedit’. See <<http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=0&b=1&c=3>> (accessed 20 May 2012).
- 37 Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis*, tr. J. J. Hagen, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1979), vol. 2, p. 182.
- 38 *Ancrene Wisse*, part 2, p. 67.
- 39 Author's translation. ‘O which and how greet prudence ys askyd and requyred to þe keypyng of þe wyt of þe sy3te, þat inpressith & enpryntyth in þe herte of a persone what þat he byholdeþ & seep...which engendryn concupiscence of þe flesch & nurschen lustes of þe body þat causen ofte a man to do wykkydly’ (ll. 356–8, 359–62). *Myroure of Recluses: A Middle English Translation of Speculum Inclusorum*, ed. Marta Powell (Hartley, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 1995), ll. 350–55.
- 40 Author's translation. ‘What maade oure modyr Eve to synne but þe lycourous look of þe deffendyd or forboden tree?’ *Myroure of Recluses*, ll. 370–71.
- 41 Gerald of Wales, *Jewel of the Church*, vol. 2, p. 182.
- 42 Grimlaicus. *Rule for Solitaries*, tr. Andrew Norton (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), pp. 57–8.

- 43 *Holy Maidenhood*. In *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, ed. and tr. Nicholas Watson and Anne Savage (Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 230.
- 44 Aelred of Rievaulx, 'A Rule of Life for a Recluse', in *Treatises and Pastoral Prayers*, tr. David Knowles (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), pp. 41–102, here p. 52.
- 45 Aelred of Rievaulx, 'A Rule of Life for a Recluse', pp. 49–50; *Ancrene Wisse*, part 2, p. 71. For more on the same-sex desires in anchoritic literature, see Michelle M. Sauer, 'Uncovering Difference: Encoded Homoerotic Anxiety within the Medieval English Eremitic Tradition', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19 (2010), pp. 133–52; Michelle M. Sauer, 'Representing the Negative: Positing the Lesbian Void & Medieval English Anchoritism', *thirdspace* 3/2 (2004), pp. 70–88.
- 46 See Goscelin of St Bertin, *Book of Encouragement and Consolation (Liber Confortatorius)*, tr. Monika Otter (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), esp. p. 95.
- 47 *Ancrene Wisse*, part 2, p. 66. See also pp. 66–72 for a complete catalogue of the sins of sight.
- 48 Linda Georgianna, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the Ancrene Wisse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 64.
- 49 Matthew Miller, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (New York: Ashgate, 2011); p. 154.
- 50 Robert Whiting, *The Reformation of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 3.
- 51 Kate Giles, 'Seeing and Believing: Visuality and Space in Pre-Modern England', *World Archaeology* 39 (2007), pp. 105–21, here p. 115.
- 52 Whiting further notes that many rood screens bore inscriptions with the important patrons' names and/or images of the donors or their patron saints, thus emphasising the significance of the financial support. See Whiting, *Reformation of the English Parish Church*, pp. 3–20.
- 53 *Sawles Warde*. In *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, ed. and tr. Watson and Savage, p. 217.
- 54 Robert Mills, 'Seeing Face to Face: Troubled Looks in the Katherine Group', in Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (eds), *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality and Sight in Medieval Text and Image* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 117–36, here p. 123.
- 55 *Holy Maidenhood*, p. 242.

- 56 David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 11.
- 57 Roberta Gilchrist suggests that the majority of cells abutted the nave (area for the laity) rather than the chancel (area for the clergy). This may have been true, although the architectural evidence that survives suggests a wider variety of locales. Moreover, in this article, I am specifically concerned with surviving cells. See Roberta Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1995), pp. 183–93.
- 58 Bob Scribner, ‘Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late-Medieval and Reformation Germany’, *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989), pp. 448–69, here p. 461.
- 59 See Michelle M. Sauer, ‘Devotional Literature: Performance & Performativity’, in Diane Watt and Liz Herbert McAvoy (eds), *The History of British Women's Writing*, vol. 1, 1350–1500 (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 103–11.
- 60 Michelle M. Sauer, “‘þe blod þ[at] bohte”: The Wooing Group Christ as Pierced, Pricked, and Penetrated Body’, Susannah Mary Chewning (ed.), *‘May your wounds heal the wounds of my soul’: The Milieu and Context of the Wohunge Group* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 123–47, here p. 129.
- 61 Because the qualities and bodily features are detailed and repetitive, coupled with the performative nature of these prayers, I would further argue that the body and spirit work in tandem to create a ubiquitous image of Christ, shared by all anchoresses in a sort of ‘synthetic sisterhood’ as a safe way to re-direct their natural female lust.
- 62 Scribner, ‘Popular Piety’, p. 459.
- 63 Author's translation. *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerde*, ed. W. Meredith Thompson, Early English Text Society 241 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958). Also includes: *On Uriesun of Ure Lourerde*; *On Wel Swuþe God Ureisun of God Almihti*; *On Lofsong of Ure Lourerde*; *On Lofsong of Ure Lefdi*; *þe Oreisun of Seinte Marie*.
- 64 R. M. Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London: Methuen, 1914), p. 143.
- 65 See Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites*, pp. 82–3.
- 66 Today the massive nineteenth-century organ blocks the view of the high altar from the squint.

- 67 See Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), plate 2, following p. 114.
- 68 The Katherine Group includes the Middle English hagiographies *Saint Katherine*, *Saint Juliana* and *Saint Margaret*, along with *Holy Maidenhood* and *Sawles Warde*. In manuscript tradition, as well as in content, the Katherine Group is closely related to anchoritic literature, particularly *Ancrene Wisse* and the Wooing Group, and all are particularly concerned with heroic chastity. See Julie B. Hassel, *Choosing Not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group* (London: Routledge, 2002); Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), for overviews of the tradition.
- 69 Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action*, pp. 190–92.
- 70 Giles, ‘Seeing and Believing’, p. 106.
- 71 Sonit Bafna, ‘Space Syntax: A Brief Introduction to its Logic and Analytical Techniques’, *Environment and Behavior* 35 (2003), pp. 17–29, here p. 17.
- 72 Aelred of Rievaulx, ‘Rule for a Recluse’, p. 66.
- 73 Bernard of Clairvaux, ‘Letter 118: To a Nun of the Convent of St. Mary of Troyes’, in *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, tr. Bruno Scott James (1953; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), pp. 179–80, here p. 180.
- 74 Giles, ‘Seeing and Believing’, p. 108.
- 75 See ‘þe blod þ[at] bohte’.
- 76 Author's translation. *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*, ll. 590–95, 598–9.
- 77 Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 17.

9

The Alluring Beauty of a Leonardesque Ideal: Masculinity and Spirituality in Renaissance Milan

Maya Corry

During the last two decades of the fifteenth century, numerous religious artworks were produced in Lombardy depicting beautiful young men in an idealised, androgynous manner ([Figures 1–3](#)). Leonardo da Vinci, who lived in Milan from 1482 until 1499, was the originator of this type, and it is repeatedly found in the work of the ‘Leonardeschi’, those artists who were working in his ambit in Lombardy. Large numbers of these images were produced, often in small-scale panels intended for personal devotion: these paintings, featuring Christ, John the Baptist, the Annunciating Angel and saints, were evidently much in demand.



Figure 1: Marco d'Oggiono, The Young Christ, c.1490–95, Fundación Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid. (Attributed by the Fundación Lázaro Galdiano to Boltraffio.) By permission of Fundación Lázaro Galdiano. Madrid.



Figure 2: Studio of Leonardo da Vinci, St John the Baptist, c.1490–1510, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1937.102. By permission of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

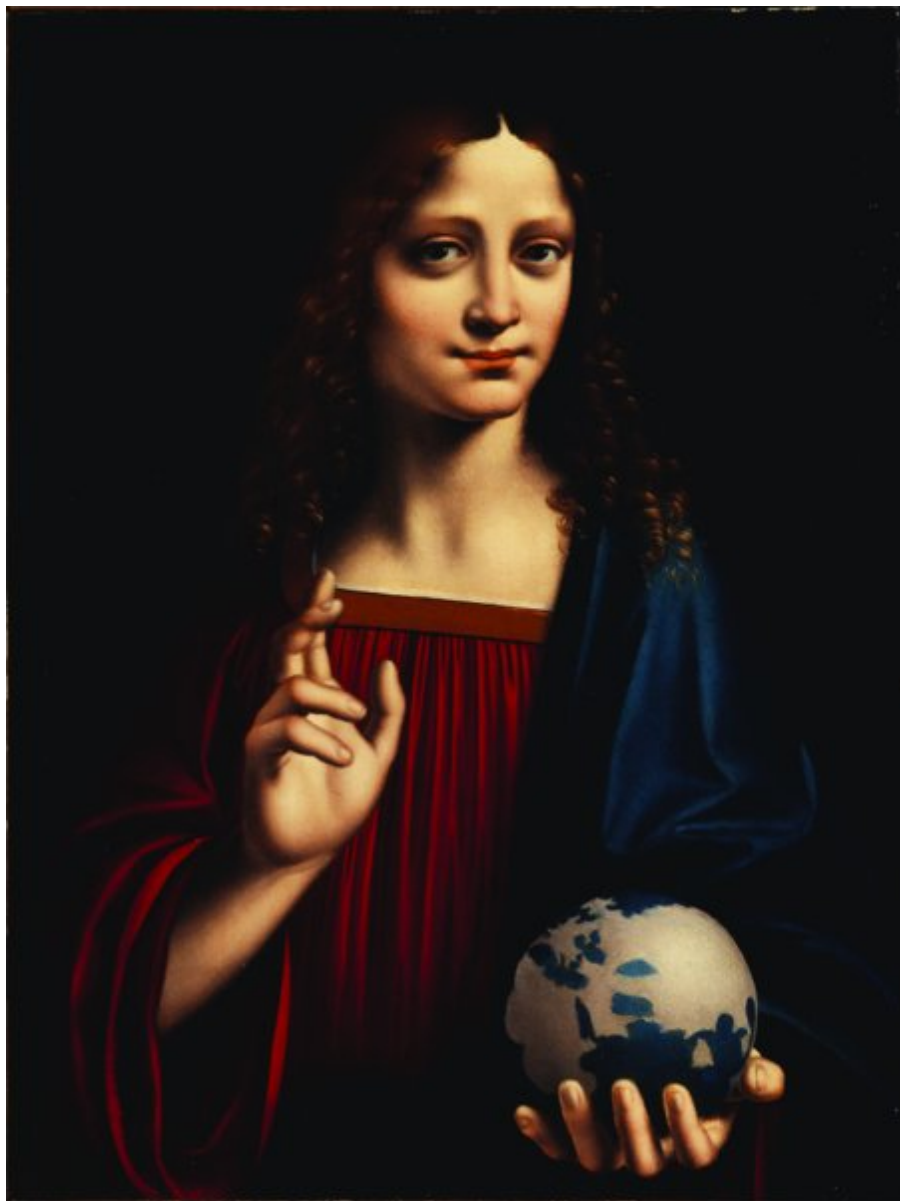


Figure 3: Marco d'Oggiono, Cristo benedicente, c.1490s, Galleria Borghese, Rome, inv 435. By kind permission of the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale della città di Roma.

Despite their popularity, the beauty of these youths and its potential impact on beholders has escaped direct analysis by art historians. Their loveliness has often been perceived to be discomfiting, even 'repulsive' and 'grotesque'.¹ This has partly been due to the assumption that it reflects Leonardo's sexual tastes. It has similarly been argued that the Leonardeschi's repetition of this

ideal type can be attributed to shared sexuality, or thoughtless imitation.² The complaint of lack of originality and creativity has dominated the literature on Leonardesque artists, severely limiting the range of questions that has been asked of their output. Discussion has generally been restricted to questions of attribution, dating and painterly techniques, with little or no analysis of the meanings of their works, or how original viewers would have interacted with them.

I will argue that investigation of the repeated appearance of the idealised youth in Lombard art can lead to fresh insights into the histories of gender, religion and the body in this period. Religious iconography that found popularity among numerous Milanese devotees cannot only have reflected Leonardo's personal sexual tastes. The abundance of these paintings must testify to more than demand for works which, through unthinking repetition, paid homage to the Florentine master (who was not at this point in his career as celebrated as he would later become).³ By moving away from an exclusive focus on the canonical figure of Leonardo, these paintings can be approached anew – as functional devotional images, rather than footnotes in the history of art.

The idealised type that appears in these artworks is youthful, male and adorned with an epicene loveliness. In order to conceive of how original viewers might have interacted with these paintings, it is necessary to investigate contemporary ideas relating to beauty, gender, age and the body. I will begin with an exploration of medieval attitudes towards the pulchritudinous youthful male form, and its religious significance. Early-modern perceptions of both masculinity and spirituality, including those of the educated layman, would have been deeply informed by these earlier currents.

The relationship between masculinity and spirituality was imbricated. In late fifteenth-century courtly Milan, beliefs about the body, gender and somatic beauty had religious implications, and vice versa. This contiguity between the sacred and the secular shaped the representation of the divine male body in the religious imagery under consideration. Thus far however, this relationship has received surprisingly little historical attention.⁴ In part, this can be attributed to the enduring influence of traditional historiographical narratives of secularisation.⁵ Particularly in investigations of the realm of the court, explorations of power, conspicuous consumption and cultural and social life have often assumed that these were areas largely untouched by religious conviction. To some extent, parallel trends in art history are similarly to blame for the failure to take seriously the spiritual role of Leonardesque images. Hans Belting's model of transition from the medieval era of the cult image, to the birth of 'art', has proved extremely powerful.⁶ It has led Renaissance art historians to acknowledge or investigate with less frequency the ways in which fifteenth- and sixteenth-century religious artworks continued to function as mystical signifiers, going beyond naturalistic representation.⁷

In this chapter, I will explore the manner in which the devotional efficacy of these images depended on the deliberate evocation of both spiritual and secular attitudes to beautiful male bodies. This will encompass examination of the role of corporeal sensation in religious worship, and in interactions with images. The centrality of artistic constructions of gender will be considered. Particular attention will be paid to the way in which these artworks implicated the viewer in the creation of meaning. Through investigation of the repeated appearance of the idealised youth in Lombard iconography, fresh insights into the histories of gender, religion and the body in this period can be gained.

Youthful male beauty in Christian thought

The fifteenth century inherited a fabric of sometimes conflicting ideas about the place of the body in religious life. Aristotelian promotion of the corporeal realm coexisted with Neoplatonic scepticism of all impermanent physical forms. However, Christian thinkers did not perceive these authorities as necessarily irreconcilable. Augustine was the most Platonic of Christian writers, while simultaneously believing that a beautiful outer appearance indicated inner moral and spiritual worth. This notion was widespread in later medieval Europe, and existed alongside the idea that the immortal soul sought escape from the sensual realm of perishable, corporeal matter.

Generally, Christianity places great emphasis on the physical nature of human experience. Not only was man made in God's image, but the divine had taken human form: as Thomas Aquinas asserted, it was 'by the mysteries of His bodily life' that Christ would 'recall man to spiritual life'.⁸ This fact was commemorated in the Mass, when devotees absorbed the transubstantiated flesh and blood into their own bodies. Belief in the Virgin's physical assumption into heaven underlined the centrality of the body to sanctity.⁹ Without this, Bonaventure commented, 'she would not be there in perfect joy; for (as Augustine says) the minds of the saints [before resurrection] are hindered, because of their natural inclination for their bodies, from being totally borne into God'.¹⁰ Key Christian thinkers agreed that somatic and spiritual unity was essential to salvation.¹¹ As Jacobus de Voragine's enormously popular hagiographical text *The Golden Legend* asserted, Christ not only 'arose in his proper body', but 'we shall arise, for his resurrection is cause of ours'.¹² In 1215, the Lateran Council had formalised this belief, declaring that all 'will rise with their own bodies, which they now wear'.¹³ To deny this was heresy.

These resurrected forms would be different in one key aspect. From Saint Paul onwards, there was theological consensus that the bodies of the devout would rise perfected. Peter Lombard's *Sentences* clarified that they would be 'clothed in the glory and beauty of impassibility'.¹⁴ Beauty was integral to resurrected bodies, not just a pleasant side effect: its presence indicated the attainment of

the divine realm. Thus a central aspect of Christian doctrine maintained that physical loveliness was a defining quality of holiness.¹⁵ This was not only true of resurrected bodies: numerous medieval and early modern sources attest to beauty being commonly thought of as a general attribute of divinity.

Resurrected bodies were to be perfect in their beauty, but also in their youthfulness, and the two states were inextricably linked in theological discourse. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that 'human nature will be brought by the resurrection to the state of its ultimate perfection which is in the youthful age', and that therefore 'all will rise again of that age'.¹⁶ Heavenly bodies were commonly thought to be free from the decay of ageing. When the thirteenth-century French nun Marguerite of Oingt experienced a vision of Christ, she urged believers to 'imagine His great beauty, so great that He has granted to all the angels and all the saints...they can no longer corrupt nor grow old'.¹⁷

This association of sanctity with youthfulness and beauty was supported by widely held medical understandings of the body. In his thirteenth-century treatise, 'How to cure and keep off the Accidents of Old Age; and how to preserve the Youth, Strength and Beauty of Body', Roger Bacon explained that ageing was accelerated by unhealthy living, but also that 'sins weaken the powers of the soul...and therefore...life is shortened'.¹⁸ He advised that devout behaviour and a correct regimen of health would bring one's humoral balance more in line with that of divine bodies, and prolong the 'age of human beauty'.¹⁹ Bacon was not unique in linking corporeal physiology with holiness. It was commonly believed that Christ had possessed the only truly flawless human form. Physicians such as Michele da Savonarola, in his *Speculum phisionomiae* of c.1442, explained that Christ's somatic perfection reflected the ideal humoral balance of his body.²⁰ This principle informed the advice of physicians who prescribed treatments to balance the humours, and looked to patients' physical appearance to gauge their success. The same belief was asserted in Pomponio Gaurico's 1504 *De sculptura*, which highlighted the links between physiognomy and art theory.²¹

Although the Virgin and female saints also communicated their sanctity through their loveliness, in both theological and medical thought it was the male form that was held to be the most perfect. Man, not woman, was made in God's image, Christ had taken the masculine form and, as Albertus Magnus explained, woman's humoral composition inclined her naturally towards 'every evil', whereas man's inclined him towards 'every good'.²² Fundamental beliefs about sexual difference were thus spiritually inflected. The consequence of the ideas outlined here was that the most perfect body it was possible to conceive of would be youthful, beautiful, masculine and divine.

Belief in an alluringly beautiful, celestial male body informed devotion. In the third century, Origen had likened God's feelings for mankind to passionate

love, and had compared Christ to *Amor* or *Eros*.²³ Richard Rolle's widely read mid-fourteenth century *Incendium Amoris* described how 'the devout mind, inflamed by the fire of Christ's love and filled with desire for heavenly joys' would be like a lover, yearning physically to 'achieve his desire...[in] his Love's arms'.²⁴ Aquinas quoted St John Chrysostom in explaining that 'Christ offers himself to us desiring to touch...Let us mix with that flesh...that he may show us with how much love he burns towards us'.²⁵ Metaphors of physical union were commonly used to explore the bridal imagery of the Canticles. When, in the early seventeenth century, the abbess of a Pescian convent, Benedetta Carlini, experienced holy visitations, the nuns testified that she took on the angelic appearance of a particularly beautiful boy of fifteen or sixteen years old, fittingly named Splenditello.²⁶ It was in this guise that Benedetta engaged in sexual relations with another nun.

While this mingling of spiritual and sexual experiences might seem shocking, it is worth remembering that aesthetic ideals are never constructed in cultural isolation, but derive their potency from broad consensus about what constitutes 'beauty' or 'ugliness'. Theological notions of corporeal perfection were deeply informed by wider beliefs about physical pulchritude. Religious discourse drew on, and contributed to, parallel celebrations of the lovely young male body in secular contexts. The medieval era saw sporadic but recurring assertions of the superior beauty, intellect and sexual potential of the youth (a trope that of course had classical antecedents). Fifteenth-century *novelle*, plays and poetry frequently and playfully referred to the erotic allure of young men, both to women and other men. Angelo Poliziano's play *Orfeo*, first performed in Mantua in 1480 and published in 1494, celebrated the superior joys of sex with youths, asserting that the discerning man found this love the 'sweetest'.²⁷

Despite Church and legal strictures against illicit sexual desire and behaviour, homosexual experiences in Renaissance Italy were common. These often occurred between a man and an adolescent, as Michael Rocke and Guido Ruggiero have highlighted.²⁸ This social reality was widely acknowledged, with preachers such as Bernardino of Siena and Savonarola being vocal in their condemnation. Despite this, across Italy in this period, young male prostitutes continued to find willing customers, and men openly discussed their love for beautiful *garzoni* in poetry and letters. Appreciation of the ideal loveliness of the youthful masculine form was evidently not restricted to the realm of religiosity. On the contrary, sexual and spiritual celebrations of male pulchritude existed in a symbiotic relationship, with each informing the other.

Masculine beauty and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Milan

What might it mean to represent divine beauty in an artwork, such as those

under consideration here? These images depict a particular ideal: youthful, epicene and pulchritudinous. The original audience must, we may infer, have perceived this as being an efficacious stimulus to personal devotion. Discourses that linked somatic perfection with both youthfulness and masculinity must have influenced the creation of these Leonardesque images. Moreover, this iconography is a record of the related association of physical loveliness with holiness. However, longstanding belief in the potency of divine beauty had not previously found artistic expression in this way. Unambiguous choices by Leonardesque artists in adopting this new ideal involved rejection both of certain earlier iconographic traditions, and scriptural descriptions of holy bodies (most notably, of John the Baptist in the Wilderness). The production and popularity of these images in late fifteenth-century Milan, while drawing on established religious ideas, must also have been informed by a more historically specific confluence of intellectual, social and cultural currents. It is these that I shall now turn to consider.

Masculine perfection was linked in Milanese court discourse to the harmony and intellectual productivity of life under Sforza rule. The chronicler Bernardino Corio eulogised the beauty and elegance of youthful male bodies at court.²⁹ These were constantly on display, adorned in elaborate and tight-fitting clothing and fine jewels.³⁰ Elite Milanese appeared to suffer none of the limits on this behaviour that were imposed in other Italian states.³¹ In the permissive environment of the Sforza court, sumptuary legislation exempted nobles from all sartorial restrictions.³² Letters and ambassadorial reports attest to concentrated focus on the display of the male, as much as the female, body, with this apparently attracting little moral condemnation.³³

Youthful male beauty was celebrated in courtly literature, in terms that echoed the painted Leonardesque ideal. In his 1491 *Favola di Psiche*, the courtier Niccolò da Correggio described Cupid as being ‘in the first flower of youth... Waves of golden hair...fell over the white breast, playing lasciviously on the forehead to frame the bright eyes and lovely face...he had such seductive beauty’.³⁴ As Correggio's language highlights, appreciation of the pulchritude of courtly *garzoni* had erotic overtones. Often, this was explicitly celebrated: a sonnet by Bernardo Bellincioni, Ludovico's court poet, told of a certain courtier with a predilection for those ‘who don't yet visit the barbers’ who had enjoyed ‘thirty-two boys, each one with more ardour than the last’.³⁵ In another poem, Bellincioni sought to convince ‘un giovane poeta’ to capitulate to his advances, and allow him to make a *mogliazzo*, ‘a little wife’, of him.³⁶

Despite the illicit potential of the youth's loveliness, the discourses outlined above highlight that this could also be imbued with spiritual significance. Alongside the longstanding and general beliefs that held that divinity inhered in youthful male loveliness, other more specific concepts are of relevance. Plato had promoted the enjoyment of masculine beauty as a route to the divine. The key expression of Renaissance Neoplatonism, Marsilio Ficino's

De amore, retained the assertion that homoerotic appreciation of the male body was a natural consequence of its superior beauty. It was common for men to 'desire...men rather than women and adolescents rather than boys', for 'Pleasantness of shape and colour...flourishes most in the greenness of youth'.³⁷ Ficino explained this in terms that echoed medical and theological discussions of the perfect humoral balance of holy bodies: 'men catch men... easily, since they...have blood and spirit which is clearer, warmer, thinner, and which is the basis of erotic entrapment'.³⁸

Recent years have seen an academic tendency to downplay the impact of this philosophy; certainly art historians no longer read Renaissance artworks solely through its lens.³⁹ However, while a detailed knowledge of rarefied Neoplatonic texts might not have been assiduously applied to the interpretation of Renaissance paintings in the fifteenth century, as was formerly argued by Edgar Wind and others, it is important not to overlook how culturally diffuse and ubiquitous these ideas were.⁴⁰ They took a starring role in the period's most widely read courtly literary productions, Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* and Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano*. These popular fictional dialogues reflected real contemporary interests and debates, of the kind that took place in the villas and palaces of Northern Italy. So even if educated contemporaries did not wholeheartedly agree with the Neoplatonic conclusions of Bembo's Lavinello or Castiglione's Bembo, they would undoubtedly have been familiar with them.

This was certainly true in courtly Milan, where Neoplatonic ideas were a key part of the cultural fabric. Neoplatonism informed the thinking of the celebrated humanist Francesco Filelfo, who spent the majority of his career in the city, and tutored the Duke Ludovico Sforza.⁴¹ In forming the Neoplatonic conclusions of the *Cortegiano*, Castiglione may have drawn on the cultural debates he witnessed during his time at the Sforza court from 1490 to 1499. Court literature of this period demonstrates the popularity of this philosophy. It was in these years that the Milanese poet and courtier Gaspare Visconti produced his *Canzonieri*, which are rife with Neoplatonic themes and are prefaced by a strident defence of the philosophy against its detractors.⁴² Visconti also wrote an epitome of Ficino's *De amore*, providing conclusive evidence of serious interest in these ideas in Milan.⁴³ Another Sforza court poet, Antonio Fileremo Fregoso, also produced explicitly Neoplatonic works. The philosophy shaped the Franciscan mathematician Luca Pacioli's *De divina proportione*, which was written in Milan in 1496–98, and illustrated by Leonardo. It was in the same period that Leonardesque devotional artworks featuring pulchritudinous youths were so in demand.

Artists and audiences in Milan would have therefore certainly been aware of key Neoplatonic ideas. With this in mind, when considering the impact of Neoplatonism in Lombardy, it is not necessary to seek to label Leonardo, other Leonardesque artists, or viewers of their works, as strict adherents of

one philosophy rather than another.⁴⁴ It is sufficient to be sure that these ideas were current and widespread. Given Neoplatonism's special emphasis on the contemplation of beauty in general, and the beauty of the youth in particular, as a route to the divine, the philosophy's pertinence to the artworks under consideration seems clear. Undoubtedly, for beholders who were well versed in this type of thinking, these ideas would have shaped the experience of worshipping in front of Leonardesque images of ideally lovely, divine youths.

Youthful beauty in Leonardo's thought

Like Ficino, Leonardo was fascinated by the perfection of what he called the 'sweet and...soft' youthful form, which 'embodies attractiveness'.⁴⁵ In his notes, he referred to the ages of man on several occasions, and repeatedly emphasised the contrast between the juvenile and the aged body.⁴⁶ He advised painters to pay attention to these differences, as 'a youth has limbs that are not very muscular nor strongly veined, and the surface is delicate and round, and tender...In man the limbs are sinewy and muscular, while in old men the surface is wrinkled, rugged and knotty'.⁴⁷ Like Bacon, Leonardo reviled the aged body, bemoaning the destruction of physical beauty that came 'with the relentless teeth of years'.⁴⁸

Leonardo's art communicates these points even more forcefully. Although his 'grotesque' figures have traditionally been treated with puzzlement or disdain, they make sense when viewed as part of an exploration into the loss of beauty that accompanied ageing: they are all middle-aged or older, with exaggerated and deformed features, sagging skin and wrinkled visages (Figure 4).⁴⁹ By contrast, the figure of a beautiful young man recurs repeatedly in his paintings, drawings and notebook sketches, and the youth's smooth perfection is often juxtaposed with mature and elderly equivalents (Figure 5). Both are ideal types: abstracted, generalised ideas of 'youth' and 'age', derived from Leonardo's observation of individual subjects, as well as his meditations on human beauty and ugliness. This fascination was longstanding. On a sheet of profile drawings from c.1478, Leonardo's investigation into the changes wrought by time is clearly apparent (Figure 6). Profiles of the ideal youth and an aged figure are directly contrasted in the top left of the page. In the centre, more detailed drawings of an adolescent and a mature man similarly allowed for the careful observation of precisely how the passing of the years altered each feature, the skin and hair, as an individual passed from the age of ideal beauty.



Figure 4: A grotesque old man in profile, Leonardo da Vinci, c.1490–95, Royal Collection, Windsor, RL 12448. Supplied by Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2013.



Figure 5: Leonardo da Vinci, Heads of an old man and a youth, 1495, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. By permission of S.S.P.S.A.E and of the Polo Museale della città di Firenze, Gabinetto Fotografico.



Figure 6: Leonardo da Vinci, Heads in Profile, c.1478, Royal Collection, Windsor, RL 12276v. Supplied by Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2013.

This exploration was imbued with meaning. The evolution from individuals to types was informed by Leonardo's entirely conventional belief that outward appearances indicated inner nature. He asserted that man's 'dignity or... baseness' could be read in exterior forms, and that the soul shaped the body, repeatedly instructing artists to pay attention to this relationship.⁵⁰ Ficino similarly held that interior states had outward manifestation in appearances.

He argued that youthful looks indicated inner harmony, for the ‘smooth and firm tenderness of the body shows that the body's constitution in the four humours is well-balanced...with the passage of time, as the finer parts of the humours are dissipated, only the coarser parts remain’.⁵¹

Ficino also maintained that the great beauty of the youthful male body was derived from its proximity to divine forms, and that this beauty was an indicator of the state of the soul. He stressed these points repeatedly, in statements such as: ‘we are attracted to a certain man...when the spark of the divine beauty shines brightly in him...the appearance and figure of a well-constructed man correspond most closely with that Reason of Mankind which our soul received from the author of all things and still retains’, and ‘since divine things are beautiful...beautiful things are like divine things and have an affinity with them’.⁵² For both Leonardo and Ficino, the ideal beauty of the youthful male body signified interior qualities. As Ficino asserted, ‘the body...is the shadow and image of the soul. And so, judging by its image, we assume that in a beautiful body there is a beautiful soul’.⁵³

Image and viewer

Leonardesque religious images were serious devotional tools, and in creating meaning they drew actively on contemporary discourses that linked divinity with the perfection of the beautiful young man. What impact might these artworks have had on viewers well versed in the types of thinking I have outlined? The repetition of the idealised youth in Milanese painting is indicative not only of the artistic intentions of Leonardo, but also those of other artists working in Lombardy, and the tastes of the intended audience. Even if the artist had been an empirical Aristotelian to the point of being an atheist, as has sometimes been suggested, this would not have altered the spiritual force of these images for their beholders.⁵⁴ In considering original interactions with these paintings, it is necessary to define who these beholders would have been. Production of these small panels was not normally documented, so it is often impossible to trace the circumstances of specific works. This does not mean, however, that it is necessary to abandon attempts to reconstruct the cultural environment in which many of them would have been viewed.

Unlike in other areas of Italy, where artists were often still classed as social inferiors, the Northern Italian courts offered a distinctive environment in which we may envisage an unusual degree of fraternisation between artists and their noble patrons. In Sforza Milan, Leonardo and Leonardesque painters, such as the Milanese nobleman Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, moved in the same social, cultural and intellectual circles as those who would have purchased their images. Both the creation and the viewing of artworks would have been shaped by this shared culture.

The circle that centred on Ludovico's court included natural philosophers, humanists, astrologers, physicians, musicians and poets, as well as the artists themselves. As recent work by Monica Azzolini has highlighted, this was a culture of intellectual disputation and discussion of the key artistic, philosophical and scientific debates of the day.⁵⁵ Luca Pacioli described one such event that took place in 1498, which was attended by 'the magnificent court', artists, orators, physicians, astronomers and 'religiosi', as well as 'secolari'.⁵⁶ Chroniclers referred to gatherings of 'lords, counts, knights, philosophers, poets and musicians' at Ludovico's court, and to the intellectual and cultural productivity of life under his rule.⁵⁷ In this highly self-referential sphere, literary and artistic productions often featured, or were dedicated to, other poets, courtiers and artists. Court poetry heaped praise on the abilities of Boltraffio and Leonardo, and both artists employed courtiers as models, with Leonardo using two nobles to provide Christ's head and hands in the *Last Supper*. Antonio de Beatis confirmed that 'the figures in the painting are portraits from life...of various court personalities'.⁵⁸ Although it is impossible to pinpoint specific exchanges between beholders and Leonardesque artworks, this is not necessary. It is clear that a certain *type* of male viewer – educated, artistically self-aware and courtly – would have interacted with these images in ways that were conditioned by this environment.

How did these images function as devotional tools, in conjunction with this educated viewer? Leonardesque artists knew that their representations could make forceful impressions on beholders. Leonardo had urged consideration of 'the eye of the spectator' and 'the effect you wish the figure to make'.⁵⁹ The argument of reception theorists such as Wolfgang Kemp that 'the function of beholding has already been incorporated into the work itself' is therefore particularly pertinent to these works.⁶⁰ These paintings operated with a high degree of self-awareness, seeking to prompt and guide responses in a number of ways. As religious images, they could justifiably anticipate that devotees would contemplate them with intense concentration, following repeated instructions on the use of images by preachers and theologians. Devout owners of panels such as these would have spent considerable time engaging directly with the nearly life-size holy figures depicted in them.

As devotional tools, these paintings derived potency from their status as material signifiers of immaterial truths.⁶¹ This was common to all religious images; it was what prevented them from becoming idolatrous.⁶² Aristotle had explained that 'the picture painted on a board is both a picture and a representation'.⁶³ Aquinas taught that 'there is a twofold movement of the mind towards an image: one indeed towards the image itself as a certain thing; another, towards the image in so far as it is the image of something else'.⁶⁴ Many thinkers, including the priest and theologian Ficino, employed metaphors of the image as a veil yielding access to divine mysteries.⁶⁵ The

concept of a hierarchical progression from the sensory realm of matter toward the immaterial one of the divine was central to Neoplatonism. The image's ontological status as a representation of the unrepresentable – the appearance of the divine – made it an ideal catalyst for this ascent.

This belief shaped Leonardo's approach to the creation of devotional art. He described the practice of 'worshipping the painting and praying to the one who is figured in it' and declaring that the religious image 'does what all the writings cannot do – to potently figure the virtue of such a Deity in an effigy'.⁶⁶ Artistic choices made by Leonardesque painters indicate their investment in these beliefs. The artistic technique of *sfumato* lent painted figures a naturalism that made flesh soft and alive, encouraging a fully sensory response in the viewer (Figures 1–3). Alexander Nagel has pointed out that *sfumato* likened 'painting to divine creation, which brought things forth from nothing', an impression confirmed by the invisibility of the brush strokes and paint – the labour and materiality of the work.⁶⁷ The boundaries between the artfully painted and the 'real' body in the image are deliberately blurred, recalling what Aristotle deemed the work's dual status as 'both a picture and a representation'. In these Leonardesque works, the independent reality of the image was in harmony with the forms depicted within it: both were beautiful. Thus the 'potency' of the divinity, in Leonardo's terms, was powerfully communicated through the combined effect of the beauty of the bodies depicted, and the beauty of the artwork itself – its surface and aesthetics.

These images have a self-conscious sensual appeal. In the Ashmolean *St John the Baptist*, the saint locks eyes with the beholder in a moment of intimate and personal exchange, communicating with them directly through his gestures and smile (Figure 3). With two fingertips gently touched to his breast, he invites the viewer to meditate upon his somatic perfection, and what this indicated of his divinity. The other hand points heavenwards, directing attention beyond the material realm of the body, to the immaterial one of the divine. The young saint emerges from the darkness, bathing the devotee in the combined light of beauty and revelation. His contrapposto stance suggests immanent movement, intensifying the immediacy of this interaction. Accentuating this impression, the painting is entirely devoid of narrative setting and detail. Instead of being located in time or place, this divine figure exists both eternally and specifically in the moment of viewing.

Numerous Leonardesque artworks functioned in a similar manner (Figures 1–3, 7 and 8). Evidently, artistic decisions had been made with the intention of increasing the force of encounters with these beautiful holy bodies, and stimulating an initial sensory response in the beholder. One did not have to be a Neoplatonist to comprehend the potency of such effects. Leonardo stressed the force that inhered in representation, saying that artists could 'overpower' viewers and make them 'love and fall in love with a painting'.⁶⁸ Images had the power to elicit sensory responses, they could 'stimulate love in you...

make your senses envious'.⁶⁹ However, also pertinent to these artworks was the insistence of Christian Neoplatonism that divine beauty was the most efficacious devotional tool in existence, due to its ability to elicit forceful responses from worshippers. Produced in a cultural sphere where this philosophy was current and popular, certainly some viewers would have had these ideas in mind when contemplating these images.



Figure 7: Leonardo da Vinci, John the Baptist, c.1508–1518, The Louvre Museum, Paris. © Photo RMN-GP Photographe Stéphane Maréchalle.



Figure 8: After Leonardo da Vinci, St. John the Baptist, c.1505–1507, Kunstmuseum, Basel. By permission of Kunstmuseum Basel. Bequest of Dr. Fritz Sarasin 1942. Photo credit: Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin P. Bühler.

The issue of sexuality

The ability of an artwork to incite sensory reactions in beholders could intensify devotional experience, and acted as a proof of artistic skill. However, there were dangers attendant on this. Pleasure taken in the beauty of the image could lead to accusations of idolatry. Worse than this was the

inherent potential of these works for prompting more serious transgressions. I have argued here that the same cultural and social currents informed both sexual and spiritual celebrations of youthful masculine beauty. This level of correspondence, coupled with encouragement to conceptualise relationships with the divine using eroticised metaphors, could lead to error. The worry of the sixth-century theologian Philoxenos of Mabbug, that passion for God could be ‘akin to the passion of fornication’, continued to trouble Saint John of the Cross in the sixteenth century, when he acknowledged that ‘when the spirit and the sense are pleased, every part of a man is moved by that pleasure...in their very spiritual exercises...there arise and assert themselves in the sensual part of the soul impure acts and motions’.⁷⁰

The potential that similar reactions could have been elicited by these Leonardesque paintings is indicated by Leonardo's stated awareness of their sensory power, and by reports of religious artworks doing exactly this. Leonardo told of a patron who begged him to remove the attributes of holiness from an image of an arousing saint, so that he could kiss it without sin. Although the modern literature that mentions this episode often says the work was of ‘a female saint’, the artist referred in fact only to ‘una cosa divina’, ‘a divine thing’: it is equally if not more probable that the image was of a male figure such as Christ or the Baptist.⁷¹ This would be in line with other instances of male bodies in religious images provoking similar reactions. Bernardino of Siena recalled ‘a person who, while contemplating the humanity of Christ suspended on the cross...sensually and repulsively polluted and defiled themselves’.⁷² Vasari also recounted a story of sexual arousal stimulated by the ‘melting beauty’ of the Saint Sebastian in an altarpiece by Fra Bartolommeo.⁷³ Significantly, Vasari asserted that Fra Bartolommeo's ability to produce such a work was because he had studiously ‘imitated...the works of Leonardo’.⁷⁴

These accounts highlight the dangers inherent in the Neoplatonic promotion of somatic pulchritude as a means to access the divine. This involved a fundamental paradox: beauty, experienced through corporeal sensory apparatus, stimulated desire for a physical body. However, the worshipper's attention was supposed then to move *away* from the realm of matter, towards the incorporeal, heavenly sphere. Ficino's stated intention was to ‘summon the lost lovers of earthly beauty to return to the love of immortal beauty’.⁷⁵ He urged readers to turn away from ‘vulgar’ pleasures, and remember that ‘love refers to something incorporeal, and beauty itself is a certain spiritual image of a thing rather than a corporeal attractiveness’.⁷⁶ But Ficino's ‘young, tender, agile, well-proportioned, and glowing’ divinity was the twin of Correggio's sexy Cupid, who made those who gazed upon his beauty ‘burn’ with ‘desire’.⁷⁷ Although Ficino entreated worshippers not to ‘descend immediately from sight to the desire to touch’, clearly the close correspondence between devotional and erotic ideals of beauty made this

extremely difficult.⁷⁸

However, the viewer of a Leonardesque devotional image who was familiar with the ideas in *De amore* would recognise that meditation on beauty should initiate a hierarchical ascent. Any courtier who had read or heard the poetry of Visconti and Fregoso would know that, as Ficino clarified: ‘He who properly uses love certainly praises the form of the body, but through that contemplates the higher beauty of the Soul, the Mind, and God, and admires and loves that more strongly’.⁷⁹ In a passage which resonates strongly with the way in which these images create meaning, Ficino laid out the next stage of this contemplative journey: ‘The beauty of the Body you can obviously see...Do you want to see the beauty of the Angel as well? Take away, please, not only the spaces of place, but also the progression of time; keep the manifold composition; immediately you will find it. Do you want to see also the beauty of God? Take away, in addition, that manifold composition of Forms; leave utterly simple form; immediately you will have reached the beauty of God’.⁸⁰ It is this ascent that was prompted by those messengers of divine truths, Gabriel and John the Baptist, in paintings that are devoid of any indication of time or place. These beautiful youths indicated with their gestures that viewers must contemplate their perfect bodies and then look *through* this, as a veil, to ‘reach the beauty of God’ (Figures 1.2, 1.7 and 1.8).

The potential for transgression meant that devotees had to be particularly self-aware while viewing images that used beauty to stimulate devotion. Augustine had emphasised that it was necessary for worshippers to interrogate outward appearances, especially beautiful ones.⁸¹ Like an *impresa* or allegory, but indicating far more complex truths, the image should not be taken at face value, but required concentrated effort to penetrate its meaning. This was not a bad thing, but could in fact enhance the image's usefulness as a devotional tool, serving to distinguish the worthy beholder from the lascivious one. For Ficino, complexity of meaning operated like a barrier, ‘behind which, as if behind veils of some kind, divine mysteries must be supposed to lie. For it was the custom of the ancient theologians to conceal their holy and pure mysteries in the shadows of metaphors, lest they be defiled by the profane and impure’.⁸² Alberti specifically noted that discerning the meaning of beauty in art ‘eludes the ignorant’.⁸³

Beauty functioned as a particularly effective veil – at once both attractive and obscure. Its sensuous appeal entrapped the ‘profane and impure’ by stimulating profane and impure thoughts. For the devout viewer, however, it was instrumental in guiding them towards God. These works required the active participation of both the body and the mind of the viewer in the creation of meaning. In this, they were in harmony with that long train of Christian thought which held that physical forms were integral to spiritual identity. Although the viewer could not hope to experience corporeal bliss on the level of complete ascension, the body could still play a central role in

elevating one toward the divine. The beholder's initial response to the image was sensory, and had to be experienced somatically. Then, intellectual interrogation of the pleasurable sensations ignited by the image would lead to recognition that the true desire was not for a physical form, but rather for unity with the divinity inherent in beauty. This was not an easy task. Ficino affirmed that 'the soul of the lover is...thrown alternately backwards and forwards. Sometimes a desire for caressing arises, but sometimes a chaste desire for heavenly beauty, and now that and now this conquers and leads him'. He concluded, however, that 'In those who have been brought up virtuously and are strong in sharpness and intelligence, the latter wins'.⁸⁴

Composite beauty and Leonardesque androgyny

Did these Leonardesque images, having stimulated a sensual reaction that could lead either to sin or to revelation, do anything to guide the worshipper toward the correct response? I think that they did. To understand how, it is necessary to look closer at their particular construction of ideal beauty. This drew not only on longstanding celebrations of the allure of the youth, in both secular and sacred contexts, but also on discourses surrounding androgyny. No convincing theories have yet been advanced as to why the particularly epicene ideal on display in these images was felt suitable for holy bodies. I argue that its appearance in numerous works indicates that Leonardesque artists had worked out an archetype of the divine body. Its repetition therefore recalled not anachronistic notions of artistic unoriginality, but the working of an icon. This ideal was carefully constructed in a manner designed to remind the viewer that the beauty upon which they gazed was spiritual, not corporeal: it was a transcendental pulchritude that could never occur in the earthly realm, only in the divine. The attentive beholder's recognition that it was this type of loveliness that illuminated these figures would bring with it awareness that these were bodies that could never be possessed sexually. Thus the viewer would be lead away from sensory, and towards intellectual contemplation.

Two key concepts informed this construction, allowing the image to function in the manner described. The first was the belief that true beauty derived from the harmonious balancing of composite components. Alberti defined beauty as the 'harmony of all the parts within a body'.⁸⁵ Its attainment in a representation was a true test of artistic skill, for 'rarely is it granted, even to Nature herself, to produce anything that is entirely complete and perfect in every respect'.⁸⁶ Ideal beauty could not simply be copied from a single exemplar found in the natural world. Instead 'excellent parts should all be selected from the most beautiful bodies'.⁸⁷ Leonardo, who knew Alberti's writings well, repeatedly told artists to pursue a similar process of selection to create an ideal beauty of composite parts. 'Look about you and take the best parts of many beautiful faces, of which the beauty is confirmed rather by public fame than by your own judgment....So select beauties as I tell you, and

fix them in your mind'.⁸⁸ Boltraffio's work attracted praise in exactly these terms, for making 'men more beautiful than Nature could make them'.⁸⁹

Christian thinkers including Augustine and Aquinas had argued that divinity could be found in the beauty that resulted from perfectly harmonised proportions.⁹⁰ The unification of component elements therefore had clear spiritual overtones. This process was fundamental to attitudes to human beauty, but also to music, geometry and architecture, which were all key pursuits at the Milanese court, and were discussed by Leonardo in his notes.⁹¹ Thus 'secular' courtly activities had a sacred dimension. This was obviously true of Pacioli's *De divina proportione*, which discussed the philosophical and theological conclusions to be drawn from the geometric achievement of unity among diverse elements.⁹² Leonardo, who illustrated the geometric forms, or 'Platonic solids', for the text, stated that beauty 'rests entirely on the divine proportions relating the parts to one another. The features must react together and simultaneously in order to produce that divine harmony which often so captivates the spectator'.⁹³ Once again, his ideas corresponded closely with Ficino's, who held that 'if you will observe all men individually you will praise none of them in every part. Whatever is right everywhere you will gather together; you will construct in yourself a whole figure from the observation of all, so that the absolute beauty of the human race, which is found distributed among many bodies, is collected in your soul by thinking of a single image'.⁹⁴ This practice of collating beautiful forms was in itself a creative mental act that had spiritual significance, as it required meditation on perfection. As Alberti explained, to seek to represent ideal beauty was 'a great and holy matter; all our resources of skill and ingenuity will be taxed in achieving it'.⁹⁵

The second discourse that informed the construction of the Leonardesque ideal is closely related to the first. A clear example of composite beauty could be found in the perfect harmonisation of masculine and feminine elements that resulted in androgyny. Evidence of a taste for androgynous forms in this period can be found in various sources. Aretino attributed a favourite prostitute's appeal to this quality. He delighted in her ability to appear as 'both sexes...in one moment you show yourself a male and in the next a female', and anticipated that other men would find this quality sexually arousing.⁹⁶ Mario Equicola, a humanist with close ties to the Milanese court, wrote that 'The visage of a woman is praised if it has the features of a man; the face of a man if it has the feminine features, hence the proverb: "the effeminate male and the manly female are graceful in almost every aspect"'.⁹⁷ It is notable that this opinion was widespread enough to be encapsulated in a saying; we might recall Leonardo's instruction to artists to adhere to generally held ideals of beauty, rather than subjective ones.⁹⁸

Once again, the aesthetic standards that were applied to beautiful bodies that were deemed arousing, also had broader relevance. Painted and sculpted

forms were similarly celebrated for their ability to harmonise differently sexed elements.⁹⁹ Vasari praised Michelangelo's Bacchus for having 'the slenderness of a youth combined with the fullness and roundness of the female form'.¹⁰⁰ Aretino noted appreciatively that the artist's Venus was 'moved by the feelings of both sexes', and that she suggested masculinity and femininity simultaneously.¹⁰¹ Dolce attributed the appeal of Titian's Adonis to his 'handsome beauty...[with] its share of femininity...something of beautiful womanhood'.¹⁰² The hermaphrodite or androgyne also had special symbolic significance in alchemical rhetoric, where the conjoining of gendered opposites – Jupiter and Venus, in Leonardo's terms – resulted in a transcendently perfect androgynous body or substance.¹⁰³ In natural philosophy, the gendering of humours and elements meant that the attainment of true balance amongst them would be ambiguously gendered. It is worth recalling that it was exactly this balance that Christ embodied, and which all men should strive for.¹⁰⁴

The harmonisation of the genders was perhaps the best demonstration of a composite beauty that transcended its parts, coming close to divine perfection. The anthropologist of religion Mircea Eliade argued that androgyny functions in all major religions as an 'expression of wholeness, the co-existence of the contraries...perfection...[and] ultimate being'.¹⁰⁵ Although it is not within the bounds of this article to explore this point in any detail, elements within Christian thought promoted androgyny as a spiritual state.¹⁰⁶ Ficino's Platonic creation myth declared 'In the beginning...there existed a certain third [gender], composed of both', and that upon 'a restitution of [this] wholeness...the race of men will be blessed'.¹⁰⁷ The early Christian thinker Maximus the Confessor wrote that in their perfection, resurrected bodies would be without distinctions of sex.¹⁰⁸ The figure of the angel is the most obvious emblem of the association of divinity with androgyny in Christian thought and imagery in this period; it is therefore unsurprising that the Leonardesque ideal was so closely derived from this iconography.¹⁰⁹

Confirmation that these ideas were current in the fifteenth century is found in a passage in Ficino that is worth quoting at length, in which he argued that the universality that the androgynous ideal could encompass would prompt correct responses to beauty's sensuous appeal:

love, kindled in the appetite of sense, is created by the form of the body seen through the eyes...it is the image of a certain particular man placed in a definite place and time...there immediately appears in the intellect another species of this image, which no longer seems to be a likeness of one particular human body...but a common Reason or definition of the whole human race equally. And so, just as from the fancy's image, taken from the body, there arises in the appetite of the sense, devoted to the body, a love inclined toward the senses, so from the intellect's universal species or Reason, which is very remote from the body, there arises in the

will another love which is very foreign to commerce with the body. The former [is] lust, the latter [is] contemplation. The former...revolves around the particular beauty of a single body, the latter around the universal beauty of the whole human race...the former drives [man] down to the bestial or voluptuous life, whereas the latter raises him up to the angelic or contemplative life.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, these paintings offered the potential for a range of responses in their viewers. Exchanges with them would have been informed by varying degrees of familiarity with the literary, theological and philosophical currents I have explored here, which were part of the cultural fabric of late fifteenth-century Italian thought. Different discourses would have dominated different interactions, and this would of course have varied from individual to individual, and from viewing to viewing. These artworks engaged directly with the challenges inherent in using physical beauty to stimulate meditation. They addressed the tension within Christianity between belief in the body's elevation in conjunction with the soul, and the denigration of its sensory nature. It is therefore inevitable that they encompassed the potential for both sanctioned and unstable readings, and the possibility of a failure of meaning was ever present. Stephen Campbell has signalled the need for greater sensitivity to how Renaissance artworks consciously engaged with ambiguity or plurality of meaning, particularly in the courtly sphere.¹¹¹ It is in this light that these works can perhaps best be approached: not by seeking to attribute didactic or immutable meanings to them, but by exploring the range of possible responses they might have stimulated.

It can be all too easy for the historian to underestimate the depth and seriousness of contemporaries' investment in spiritual and mystical beliefs. These are difficult things to recover, but this does not mean that we should not try. Interior devotion was central to Renaissance religiosity, to social interaction, to identity and to 'secular' court culture. By paying attention to the nuances and complexities of how popular images like the Leonardesque ones could have functioned, new insights into these contiguous areas can be gained. These artworks engaged directly with, and contributed to, contemporary debates over the relationship between body and soul, and the sensual and the spiritual. In its ability to awaken desire for a beautiful form that was comprehended as spiritual, an image was a uniquely potent devotional tool. Composite beauty that came close to the divine could be figured only in the mind, or – more accessibly – in an artwork. Consequently, images like these were not simple accessories to devotion, but were often at the heart of religious worship.

Notes

I would like to thank Gervase Rosser, Tim McCall, Jill Pederson and the

anonymous reviewers of this journal for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article, and also Martin Kemp, Luke Syson, Catherine Whistler, Geraldine Johnson, Michael Kwakkelstein and Nicholas Davidson for their insightful observations in discussion. My thanks also go to Sue Morgan, Joanna de Groot, and all the authors contributing to this issue for their contributions at the stimulating colloquium on 'Gender and Religion'.

- 1 Carlo Pedretti, 'The "Angel in the Flesh"', *Achademia Leonardi Vinci: Journal of Leonardo Studies and Bibliography of Vinciana* 4 (1991), pp. 24–48, here p. 39.
- 2 Artists regularly deemed 'Leonardesque' include Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, Marco d'Oggiono, Francesco Napoletano, Salaì and Francesco Melzi. There is a longstanding critical tradition of disparaging the work of these artists. See e.g., Bernard Berenson, *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, vol. 1, *Venetian and North Italian Schools* (1907; London: Phaidon, 1968), pp. 80, 87; Roberto Longhi, *Officina ferrarese* (Rome: Edizioni d'Italia, 1934), p. 176. More recent assessments in a similar vein include David Alan Brown, 'Leonardo and the Idealized Portrait in Milan', *Arte Lombarda* 67 (1983), pp. 102–116, esp. p. 108; Martin Kemp, Philip Steadman and Jane Roberts, *Leonardo da Vinci*, exhibition catalogue (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989), p. 8; Pietro Marani (ed.), *The Legacy of Leonardo: Painters in Lombardy 1490–1530* (Milan: Skira, 1998), p. 10; Marika Apring, Antonio Mazzotta, Ashok Roy, Rachel Billinge and David Pegg, 'Painting Practice in Milan in the 1490s: The Influence of Leonardo', in *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, vol. 32, *Leonardo da Vinci: Pupil, Painter and Master* (London: National Gallery, 2011), p. 80.
- 3 Leonardo was not perceived as the preeminent artist in Sforza Milan in these years, but as one among several noted artists and architects, including Vincenzo Foppa, Giovanni Cristoforo Romano, Bramante and Cristoforo Solari. Other 'Leonardesque' artists, particularly Boltraffio, were also successful in their own right. Leonardo's failure to cast the equestrian monument to Francesco Sforza in this period, and lack of numerous major commissions in Milan should be noted, alongside his successes. Indeed, the commission to decorate the rooms of the court at Porta Giovia in Milan only came to him after the initial artist had abandoned the work, and Ludovico had failed to secure the services of Pietro Perugino to complete it. See Evelyn Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 232.
- 4 This is partly a consequence of historical focus on the relationship between spirituality and femininity in this period. Numerous works on female mysticism, women's religious orders, the feminine aspects of monastic identity and the maternal role of the divinity have following the path

forged by Caroline Walker Bynum in her seminal studies *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1982) and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987). Without denying the enormous value of this body of historical work, it is perhaps also true that it has at times been too exclusive in its focus.

- 5 The question of whether this was a period of increasing secularisation has occupied historians and art historians for well over a century. Interestingly, neglect of the mystical aspects of religiosity in Renaissance historiography and art history is in contrast with scholarship on the preceding medieval and subsequent Reformation and Counter-Reformation, eras; the lingering impact of an older periodisation is evidently in part to blame for this.
- 6 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 7 In art history, there has been some renewed interest in the functioning of religious art in these years. Marcia Hall's recent publication, *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art: Titian, Tintoretto, Barocci, El Greco, Caravaggio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pays attention to the late Cinquecento, and this period is scrutinised in more detail in Alexander Nagel's *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Both Hall and Nagel accept Belting's premise that naturalism in religious art existed in a dialectical relationship with its mystical functioning.
- 8 Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, tr. Cyril Vollert (St Louis and London: Herder, 1952), ch. 201, p. 216.
- 9 Belief in the assumption of John the Evangelist also persisted throughout the medieval and early modern periods, despite denials by Christian authorities such as Augustine that this had occurred. For visual evidence of this belief see, e.g., the panel painting of the subject by Taddeo Gaddi, Collezione Vittorio Cini, Venice.
- 10 Quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 257.
- 11 Such arguments, expressed by figures such as Augustine, Bonaventure and Aquinas, drew on the Aristotelian understanding of the dependence of the soul on the body and its sensory apparatus, in contrast to the extreme Platonic, dualist, position. Christian thinkers, however, turned away from the potential conclusion to be drawn from Aristotle: that the soul, in its utter dependence on the body, would perish at death. The Church

- attempted to silence debates over this issue with the pronouncement of the Lateran Council in 1513 on the immortality of the soul, and through the persecution of thinkers such as Pietro Pomponazzi, who at the same period continued to explore alternative possibilities.
- 12 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, tr. William Granger Ryan (Princeton and Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 217, 219.
 - 13 Norman P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols (London: Sheed & Ward and Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), vol. 1, *Nicaea I – Lateran V*, p. 230.
 - 14 Peter Lombard, *The Sentences. Book 4: On the Doctrine of Signs*, tr. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), Distinction XLIII, ch. 7 (250), 2, p. 238.
 - 15 This belief co-existed with the contrary position: that beauty was a mask for vice and corruption, and a physically broken, emaciated or even ugly form could indicate sanctity. Paradoxically, Platonic thought could be interpreted in this light; in the *Symposium* the philosopher emphasised the spiritual wisdom that lay beneath Socrates' ugly exterior. In the Renaissance, Michelangelo explored this aspect of the relationship between exterior appearances and interior morality, see Paul Barolsky, *Michelangelo's Nose: A Myth and its Maker* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).
 - 16 Thomas Aquinas, *The 'Summa Theologica' of St. Thomas Aquinas, Third Part (Supplement) QQ. LXIX-LXXXVI*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: &c., 1921), III (supplement), Q. 81, Art. I. Many theologians surmised that the devout would be resurrected in their thirty-three-year-old bodies, as this was Christ's age at his death.
 - 17 Quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 336.
 - 18 Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, vol. 2, tr. Robert Belle Burke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 618.
 - 19 Bacon, *Opus Majus*, p. 619.
 - 20 Savonarola was personal physician to the Estes in Ferrara, and was therefore a significant figure in Northern Italian courtly culture.
 - 21 For a discussion of this connection see Piers Britton, '(Hu)moral Exemplars: Type and Temperament in Cinquecento Painting', in Jean A.

- Givens, Karen M. Reeds and Alain Touwaide (eds), *Visualising Medieval Medicine and Natural History 1200–1500* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 177–203.
- 22 Albertus Magnus, ‘Questiones de animalibus’, in *Questions Concerning Aristotle's On Animals*, tr. Irven M. Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), p. 455.
- 23 For a discussion of Origen's interpretation of Christ as the beloved bridegroom of the Canticles, see Regina Stefaniak, ‘Replicating Mysteries of the Passion: Rosso's Dead Christ with Angels’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 45 (1992), pp. 703–6.
- 24 Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, tr. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 131, 164.
- 25 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III.79.3. Quoted in Stefaniak, ‘Replicating Mysteries’, p. 721.
- 26 See Judith Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 122. Similarly, Jeanne de Angès, the superior of an Ursuline house in Loudon, described the guardian angel who appeared to her, as an adolescent male ‘of rare beauty’. Quoted in Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 135–43.
- 27 Angelo Poliziano, ‘Fabula di Orfeo’, in Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti (ed.), *L'Orfeo del Poliziano: Con il testo critico dell'originale e delle successive forme teatrali* (Padua: Antenore, 1986), lines 269–72, p. 161.
- 28 Michael Roche, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- 29 Bernardino Corio, *Storia di Milano* (Padua: Frambotto, 1646), p. 882.
- 30 On the importance of beauty and adornment to male status, and on male fashions, rather than female, leading the way in personal ornament, see Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Tim McCall, *Brilliant Bodies: Men at Court in Early Renaissance Italy* (forthcoming).
- 31 For a comprehensive overview of Italian sumptuary legislation, see Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy 1200–1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), and bibliography.

- 32 Milanese sumptuary laws have been published in Ettore Verga, 'Le leggi suntuarie milanesi', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, ser. 3, vol. 9 (1898), pp. 7–71.
- 33 For a detailed exploration of attitudes to masculine deportment and adornment in the Sforza court, see Maya Corry, 'Masculinity and Spirituality in Renaissance Milan: The Role of the Beautiful Body in the Art of Leonardo da Vinci and the Leonardeschi' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 2013).
- 34 Niccolò da Correggio, *Opere*, ed. Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti (Bari: Laterza, 1969), pp. 78, 93–4.
- 35 Bernardo Bellincioni, *Le Rime di Bernardo Bellincioni*, ed. Pietro Fanfani (Bologna: G. Romagnoli, 1876), CXVI.
- 36 *Rime di Bernardo Bellincioni*, CLX.
- 37 Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary of Marsilio Ficino of Florence on the Symposium of Plato On Love*, tr. Jayne Sears (Texas: Spring Publications, 1985), pp. 87, 135 (hereafter Ficino).
- 38 Ficino, p. 165.
- 39 In intellectual history, an earlier focus on the significance of Plato to early modern thought was superseded by arguments that placed more emphasis on the importance of Aristotle. More recently this has given way to a recognition that the world was not divided between two absolutely distinct philosophies, and that, in reality, both were current in Italy c.1500. See Eckhard Kessler, Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (eds), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 40 For examples of the now outmoded art historical focus on the significance of Neoplatonism to Renaissance art, see Ernst Gombrich, 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8 (1945), pp. 7–60; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958); Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960).
- 41 Filelfo sought to syncretise the thinking of authorities such as Plato and Aristotle in his philosophy, though he was more Platonic in his conclusions on beauty and pleasure. See Eugenio Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, tr. Giorgio Pinton (Amsterdam: New York, Rodopi), vol. 1, pp. 187–9.
- 42 Gaspare Visconti, *I canzonieri per Beatrice d'Este e per Bianca Maria Sforza*, ed. Paolo Bongrani (Milan: Fondazione Arnaldo e Alberto

- 43 Bibl. Trivulziana, MS 1093, ff. 131r–132r. The epitome is transcribed and published in Cynthia M. Pyle, *Milan and Lombardy in the Renaissance: Essays in Cultural History* (Rome: La Fenice, 1997), pp. 90–93. Visconti, who was a key figure at court, wrote a sonnet in praise of Leonardo's art and undoubtedly knew the artist personally. His translation would have made the central tenets of *De amore* accessible to those in Milan who did not have good Latin. Ficino had written the Latin manuscript of the text in 1469, and it circulated in this format before publication in 1484. Ficino's translation into Italian was not published until 1544.
- 44 Leonardo was of course deeply influenced by Aristotelianism. However, he was certainly also interested in Neoplatonism, and aspects of both philosophies appear in his notes, and I would argue, his artistic productions. It is more accurate to say that he took a syncretic approach to these positions, as many of his contemporaries did, rather than adopting one, and rejecting the other outright.
- 45 Kemp, Steadman and Roberts, *Leonardo da Vinci*, p. 152.
- 46 Leonardo divided the ages into: 'i[n]fantia, pueritia, adolescie[n]tia, giove[n]tù, vecchiezza, decrepitudine'. Jean Paul Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2 vols (London; Phaidon, 1970), 1, no. 582 (hereafter Richter). See also no. 367. Youth was a far more concrete concept in the medieval and early modern periods than today. The idea that life was divisible into separate, definable phases had been inherited from the classical world, in which writers had described three, four, six or seven ages. Imagery of the ages of man was omnipresent in the Renaissance, in Books of Hours, illuminated manuscripts, building decorations, paintings and popular prints. The topos of the ages of man informed medical theory, astrology and education, and was referenced in sermons and plays. Belief in age as a defining characteristic therefore permeated Renaissance society and thinking, and was one of the key organising principals of society, reflected in laws and customs which often assigned an individual a different status according to his age (these distinctions were sharper for men than for women).
- 47 Richter, 1, no. 367.
- 48 Richter, 1, no. 207.
- 49 Further examples include drawings from the Royal Collection, Windsor (RL 12449r; RL12490r; RL 12492r; RL12493r), the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (Inv. F. 274 inf.53; Inv. F. 263 inf. 78), and the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (Inv. JBS 19).

- 50 Richter, 2, no. 797; 1, no. 598. Leonardo owned Michael Scot's *Liber phisionomiae*. Leonardo also stated that he wished to 'describe' human physiognomies, and owned several books on the subject. On the artist's relationship with the discipline of physiognomy, see Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (1981; rev. edn, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 142–4; Michael Kwakkelstein, *Leonardo da Vinci as a Physiognomist: Theory and Drawing Practice* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 1994); Piers Britton, 'The Signs of Faces: Leonardo on Physiognomic Science and the "Four Universal States of Man"', *Renaissance Studies* 16 (2002), pp. 143–62.
- 51 Ficino, p. 95.
- 52 Ficino, pp. 130, 91.
- 53 Ficino, pp. 131–2.
- 54 The notion that Leonardo was irreligious is essentially an anachronistic one, owing more to modern notions of the great genius, working independently of his time, than to anything in his output. The notes for his treatises were not intimate reflections of his personal philosophy or attitude to divine mysteries. He himself explained 'I leave alone the sacred books', but this was not a disavowal of the Christian faith, as he added 'for they are supreme truth' (Richter, 2, no. 837). Leonardo's studies were informed and motivated by an underlying belief in a divine designer of the natural forces and structures that he was investigating. His statement that art was a way of 'seeking to understand the Creator of so many admirable things, and this is the way to love such a great Inventor', suggests that he perceived his activities in this light, as does his praise for the 'first Mover' who controls all the forces of Nature. See Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, tr. Philip McMahon, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), vol. 1, p. 53; Richter, 2, no. 1134. Leonardo also noted that 'Our body is dependent on heaven', and 'the soul that dwells in that structure...is a thing divine', the work of God (Richter, 2, 1138; vol. 2, 1140). Moreover, whether Leonardo viewed his study of the physical beauty of divine bodies in a religious light or not, he would certainly have been aware that others would do so.
- 55 Monica Azzolini, 'Anatomy of a Dispute: Leonardo, Pacioli and Scientific Courtly Entertainment in Renaissance Milan', *Early Science and Medicine* 9 (2004), pp. 115–35; Monica Azzolini, 'Leonardo da Vinci's Anatomical Studies in Milan: A Re-examination of the Sources', in Givens et al. (eds), *Visualising Medieval Medicine*, p. 175. See also Jill Pederson, 'The Academia Leonardi Vinci: Visualizing Dialectic in Renaissance Milan, 1480–1499' (doctoral thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2007).

- 56 Luca Pacioli, *De divina Proportione* (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1956), p. 3.
- 57 Henrico Boscano, *Isola beata* (manuscript, private collection, c.1513), quoted in Pederson, 'Accademia Leonardi Vinci', p. 21. Corio, *Storia di Milano*, p. 882.
- 58 Richter, 1, no. 667; Richter, 2, 1403. Antonio de Beatis, *The Travel Journal of Antonio de Beatis*, ed. J. R. Hale, tr. J. R. Hale and J. M. A. Lindon (London: Hakluyt Society, 1979), p. 182.
- 59 Richter, 1, no. 537; Richter, 1, 542.
- 60 Wolfgang Kemp, 'The Work of Art and Its Beholder: Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception', in Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds), *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 180–96, here p. 181.
- 61 For a recent discussion of this aspect of devotional art, see Klaus Krüger, 'Signa et res – The Pictorial Discourse of the Imaginary in Early Modern Italy', *Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Columbia University*, New York Luncheon Seminar, 26 January 2005, available at <http://www.italianacademy.columbia.edu/publications/working_papers/2004_2005/paper_sp05_Kruger.pdf> (accessed 12 March 2011).
- 62 For a discussion of the tensions in religious art at the close of the fifteenth century between the ideals of holiness, the icon and portrait, see Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, chs. 1 and 2, pp. 13–40.
- 63 Aristotle, 'De Memoria', in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. William David Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908–52), vol. 3, *Parva naturalia*, 450a, 10–30.
- 64 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, 25, 3.
- 65 Ficino, p. 72. This metaphor reflected the contemporary practice of veiling religious images. Leonardo referred to this custom, questioning 'Do we not see the pictures representing the divine beings constantly kept under coverlets of the greatest price?...at the moment of unveiling the great multitude of people who have gathered there immediately throw themselves to the ground worshipping and praying to the deity, who is represented in the picture', Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo on Painting: An Anthology of Writings by Leonardo da Vinci with a Selection of Documents Relating to His Career as an Artist*, ed. Martin Kemp, tr. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 20. On the religious and artistic significance of this custom, see Paul

- Hills, 'Titian's Veils', *Art History* 29 (2006), pp. 771–95; Paul Hills, *The Renaissance Image Unveiled: From Madonna to Venus* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2010); Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), pp. 116–20.
- 66 Leonardo da Vinci, in Claire J. Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), p. 189.
- 67 Alexander Nagel, 'Leonardo and *sfumato*', *Res: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 24 (Autumn 1993), pp. 7–20, here p. 18.
- 68 Leonardo, in Farago, *Paragone*, p. 231.
- 69 Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Kemp, p. 24.
- 70 Quoted in Peter Brown, 'Bodies and Minds: Sexuality and Renunciation in Early Christianity', in Kim M. Philips and Barry Reay (eds), *Sexualities in History: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 129–40, here p. 139. Quoted in Robert Mills, 'Ecce Homo', in Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih (eds), *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 152–73, here p. 152.
- 71 In line with the translation in Farago, *Paragone*, 'Once I happened to make a painting which represented something divine that was brought by someone who loved it, who wanted to remove the representation of the deity so he would be able to kiss the painting without misgivings', p. 231.
- 72 Bernardino of Siena, *De inspirationibus*, sermon III, article II, chap. 1, in *San Bernardini of Senensi, Opera Omnia* (Florence: Ad Claras Aquas, 1956), vol. 6, p. 259. Quoted and translated in Mills, 'Ecce Homo'.
- 73 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, tr. Gaston du C. de Vere, 2 vols (London: David Campbell, 1996), vol. 1, p. 676.
- 74 Vasari, *Lives*, p. 675. See also p. 670.
- 75 Ficino, p. 1.
- 76 Ficino, pp. 135, 88.
- 77 Ficino, p. 84. Correggio, *Opere*, pp. 93–4. See p. 6 of this article for Correggio's description of Cupid.
- 78 Ficino, p. 119.
- 79 Ficino, p. 54.

- 80 Ficino, p. 139.
- 81 Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, tr. F. J. Sheed (London: Sheed & Ward, 1984), Book X, ch. 6, p. 171.
- 82 Ficino, p. 72.
- 83 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, ed. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), pp. 96–9.
- 84 Ficino, p. 125.
- 85 Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, tr. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988), p. 156.
- 86 Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 156.
- 87 Alberti further explained that ‘every effort should be made to perceive, understand and express beauty. Although this is the most difficult thing of all, because the merits of beauty are not all to be found in one place, but are dispersed here and there in many, every endeavour should nonetheless be made to investigate and understand it thoroughly’. He used the well-known example of Zeuxis’s portrait of a beautiful woman, created by combining the most attractive parts of several maidens, to illustrate this. Alberti, *On Painting*, pp. 98–100.
- 88 Richter, 1, no. 587. Leonardo repeated this advice on several occasions, for instance: ‘all the drawings from the nude...should be brought together and a choice made of the best limbs and bodies among them, to apply in practice’, Richter, 1, 497. Also, ‘make an effort to collect the good features from many beautiful faces’, *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Kemp, p. 204.
- 89 The poet Girolamo Casio wrote of his friend’s skill: ‘Beltraffio che col Stile e col penello/ Di Natura facea ogni huom più bello’. Quoted in Maria Teresa Fiorio, *Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, un pittore Milanese nel lume di Leonardo* (Milan: Jandi Sapi, 2000), p. 3.
- 90 See e.g., Augustine of Hippo, *On True Religion*, XXX, 55, tr. John H. S. Burleigh, in John H. S. Burleigh (ed.), *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 225–83; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, 12, 1.
- 91 Leonardo was a skilled musician and his architectural notes from this period repeatedly emphasise the importance of harmony. See e.g., Richter, 2, nos 760, 764–8.
- 92 See the first part of the text, the *Compendium de divina proportione*.

- 93 Richter, 1, nos 79–80.
- 94 Ficino, p. 142.
- 95 Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 156.
- 96 Pietro Aretino, letter to 'La Zufolina', March 1548. Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Sergio Ortolani (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1945), pp. 199–201. Quoted and translated in Mary Rogers and Paola Tinagli (eds), *Women in Italy 1350–1650: Ideals and Realities, A Sourcebook* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 278. For a discussion of the significance of the theme of ambiguity to gender and sexuality in Aretino's writing, see Raymond B. Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr: Sexuality, Satire and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).
- 97 Mario Equicola, 'Libro di natura d'amore', in Paola Barocchi (ed.), *Scritti d'arte del cinquecento*, 3 vols (Milan and Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1971–79), vol. 2, p. 1617. Quoted and translated in Fredrika H. Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: *Femmina, Masculo, Grazia*', *Art Bulletin* 82 (2000), pp. 51–67, here p. 56.
- 98 See p. 14.
- 99 See Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo', for a discussion of the significance of androgyny in Italian Renaissance art theory. See also her essay 'Leonardo, *grazia*, and the gendering of style', in Claire Farago (ed.), *Leonardo da Vinci and the Ethics of Style* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008). Jacobs's focus on intellectual discourse can be expanded to consider how these concepts shaped both sensual and devotional responses to real or painted bodies that were ambiguously gendered.
- 100 Vasari, *Lives*, vol. 2, p. 651.
- 101 Pietro Aretino, letter to the Duke of Urbino, Guidobaldo della Rovere, after April 16, 1542. Transcribed in France Falletti and Jonathan Katz Nelson (eds), *Venus e Amore: Michelangelo e la nuova bellezza ideale* (Florence: Giunti, 2002), Appendix 1, p. 230.
- 102 Ludovico Dolce, letter to Alessandro Contarini, transcribed and translated in Mark W. Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino' and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 213.
- 103 These gendered alchemical terms were used by Leonardo in his discussion of substances and their properties, see Richter, 1, nos 637, 641. On the alchemical hermaphrodite/androgyny, see Allison B. Kavey, 'Mercury Falling: Gender Flexibility and Eroticism in Popular Alchemy', in Kenneth

Borris and George Rousseau (eds), *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) pp. 221–37; Leah DeVun, ‘The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69 (2008), pp. 193–218.

- 104 This did not mean that genuine asexuality was desirable, more that an imbalance of masculine or feminine humours would lead to sickness, and should be restored to a median position. Although it was an aesthetic standard that had clear implications for bodily presentation, and notions of corporeal beauty, celebrations of androgyny did not result in the elevation of real intersex bodies. It should also be noted that of course the figure of the effeminate young man drew criticism from many sources across Italy at this time, pointing to some of the tensions inherent in this ideal, which necessarily focused attention on liminal areas and boundaries.
- 105 Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 174–5. See also Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (New York: Plume, 1974), pp. 420–21.
- 106 This question is examined in detail in Corry, ‘Masculinity and Spirituality’.
- 107 Ficino, pp. 71–3.
- 108 These ideas are explored in his work *Ambigua*. See Henry Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels in History: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in the University of Oxford on 14 November 1997* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 18.
- 109 The cultural meanings attached to angelic androgyny are explored in Corry, ‘Masculinity and Spirituality’.
- 110 Ficino, p. 154.
- 111 Stephen J. Campbell, ‘Eros in the Flesh: Petrarchan Desire, the Embodied Eros, and Male Beauty in Italian Art, 1500–1540’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35 (2005), pp. 629–662, esp. pp. 635–8.

‘Deaf to the Word’: Gender, Deafness and Protestantism in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland

Esme Cleall

In autumn 1812, Dr Lys gave a lecture at the Birmingham Philosophical Institution on the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, a topic then of considerable public interest. Lys's authoritative speech was considered impressive but the event's highlight was a demonstration by eight-year-old Jane Williams, a girl ‘deaf and dumb’ from birth, whom Lys and a colleague had educated. The audience was ‘much interested’ by this ‘remarkably engaging’ child, whose eagerness to execute her teacher's instructions afforded ‘a most affecting spectacle’.¹ So influential was her performance, that the following year saw the inauguration of the impressively named General Institution Established in Birmingham for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Children. The Founding Committee, it was recorded, had ‘looked upon’ deaf people as a ‘class’ of ‘fellow creatures’ who were ‘excluded from their natural share in human rights’ and ‘degraded’ from ‘their rank as human beings’. The committee's pity moved them to action. The institution was founded in the hope that deaf people might be ‘rescued’ from their ‘forlorn condition’ by teaching them language, ‘inculcating’ in them ‘the precepts of morality’, and showing them ‘the hopes of Religion’. Those ‘misfortune’ had placed ‘in this unhappy class’ would thereby come to understand that, while ‘living among an instructed people, in a Christian land’, the blessings of Christianity ‘were lost to them’ in their state of irreverent deafness. Future generations of deaf children educated in the Institution were gratefully to thank its founders for the many ‘gifts’ bestowed upon them: obedience ‘to the moral law’, the ability to offer ‘thanksgiving and prayer to their maker’ and their inheritance of ‘the “promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come”’.² Spectacle, pity, dependence, gratitude, irreligion, faith, misfortune, instruction and ignorance; such was the ‘affecting’ mix the ‘plight of the deaf and dumb’ brought to the minds of the hearing patrons of the General Institution and its many counterparts which, in the early nineteenth century, were springing up across Britain.

This was a time when the meaning of disability was changing rapidly in western European thought as a disabled/able-bodied dichotomy became increasingly prevalent.³ Those with physical impairments were no longer imagined on a continuum of the infinitely flawed human body, but, instead, as

Sarah Chinn puts it, as ‘constitutionally different’, a shift that echoed a hardening of attitudes towards race and gender in this period.⁴ In this article, I argue that gender and religion helped to frame this reconfiguration of attitudes towards disability. Gender was an important framework through which disability was filtered; disability is perceived to trouble the performance of independence, beauty, sexuality, parenthood and identity.⁵ In nineteenth-century Britain, religious discourses, highly influential in articulating otherness, helped make disability a marked category and ensure that people with disability were read through a heightened moral framework.

My discussion focuses on exploring the intersections between disability, gender and religion as corroborates of identity and categories of difference, in the context of discourses about people born deaf or deaf from a young age (that is the social category of the ‘deaf and dumb’) in nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland.⁶ While the details of deaf history are little known beyond deaf and disability historiography, many of the tropes I explore in this chapter will be familiar to social historians: the exclusion of those considered ‘heathen’; the association of irreligion with gender deviance; the feminisation of philanthropic Christian ‘rescue’ narratives; the gendered architecture and daily spiritual practice of missions and boarding schools; and the construction of devout Christian sufferers in sentimental literature.⁷ In examining how such narratives identified ‘the deaf and dumb’ as a social category, I aim not just to add another case study where these patterns can be found, but, in introducing a new embodied subject, ‘the deaf mute’, to think more about these categories. Adding what Catherine Kudlick discusses as ‘another “Other”’ extends and complicates existing work on gender and religion and adds further questions to explore.⁸ One might ask how deafness, which cuts across class, gender and ethnicity in uneven and unpredictable ways (including within an individual lifecycle), affects these discourses? Can the ‘invisible difference’ of deafness help us to think further about embodied religious experience? And, what does the disruption of devotion and religiosity by the fear of impairment tell us about normative religious practice? Deafness sometimes appears to override gender as a category of identification, and yet, like disability more widely, deafness has only recently been explored as an intersecting category of analysis. My discussion is divided into three parts. First, I examine how the ‘deaf and dumb’ were configured as a social problem and argue that perceived irreligion helped define their otherness. Second, I discuss the part gender played in this construction. Third, I explore efforts to ‘reform’ and ‘improve’ deaf people through missionary work, educational institutions and asylums, and the creation of the new gendered subject it entailed. I argue throughout that conflicting constructions of deaf people as ‘heathen’ or as ‘pious’ were both premised on reading deaf people through a heightened moral framework, based on the otherness of disability, of which gender was always constitutive.⁹

Deaf ‘heathens’: the problem of the ‘deaf and dumb’

In the nineteenth century, deaf people were a significant minority of the population, a formative group in reconceptualising disability and a social group defined through their perceived otherness.¹⁰ In many cases, deaf people were refused property rights, they were unable to inherit, denied access to the courts, deemed unable to give evidence, excluded from education, discouraged from marrying and often institutionalised.¹¹ Determined to ‘cure’ and eliminate deafness, physicians drilled holes through deaf children's jaws, poured caustic substances into their ears, pierced eardrums, applied white-hot metal and in some cases fractured their skulls behind the ear.¹² Such procedures invariably failed to induce hearing and were often fatal. These exclusions and interventions were justified on the grounds that ‘the deaf and dumb’ fell outside ‘full personhood’; deaf people were, in Brandon and Miller's memorable phrase, ‘damned for their difference’.¹³ Religion and irreligion were key discourses in framing this otherness.

From Leviticus's injunctions on the ritual ‘uncleanliness’ of the ‘blind’ and ‘lame’ (Leviticus 21:17–23) to the miracle healings of the Gospels, Christianity's founding texts and subsequent teachings are riddled with powerful and conflicting interpretations of disability.¹⁴ When Moses complained of being ‘slow of speech’, the Divine response that it was ‘I the Lord...who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind’ (Ex. 4:11) appears to sanction disabled ways of being as God-given. Yet the ‘infliction’ of blindness and scourges on Job suggest disability was bestowed as punishment or trial. Jesus’ healing ministry evoked more rich symbolism around disability and when he opened the ears of the deaf man (Mark 7:34) Jesus bestowed on deaf people the same close identification as he did with blind people and leprosy sufferers. The interpretation of such acts as benevolent was inspirational to many in the nineteenth century, including founders of schools and missions for the deaf. Yet, as theologians of disability have noted, the implication that people who were blind, deaf or lame were spiritually healed by the *removal* of their deafness or lameness, problematically aligns able-bodiedness with salvation.¹⁵ Furthermore, throughout the New Testament, sensory disability operates as an extended metaphor for irreligion, something nineteenth-century commentators elaborated to depict hearing and sighted ‘heathens’ as ‘deaf to the Word’ and ‘blind to the light’. But while the ambivalent implications of Scriptural texts for understanding deafness have been enduring, the meanings attached to deafness, and embodied experiences of it are always socially and historically contingent. While Biblical depictions of blindness and deafness shared many tropes, by the nineteenth century the (albeit limited) work on disability in this period suggests that it was the deaf, far more than other disabled populations, who represented a religious ‘problem’.¹⁶

The Protestant Reformation generated a shift in the relationship between deafness and Christianity which demonstrates the profoundly embodied nature of religious experience and practice. As the early modernist historian of sound Emily Cockayne notes, the Catholic liturgy is a five-sense experience. If deaf people could not hear the spoken and sung components of the mass, they could see the candles, images and icons, smell the incense, touch rosary beads, relics and holy water, and taste the Eucharistic Supper.¹⁷ At the same time as Reformation changes discouraged and suppressed these aspects of worship, new importance was placed on hearing 'the Word', now delivered in the vernacular.¹⁸ The lack of comparative historical research on deafness makes it difficult to assess the impact of these changes on attitudes towards deafness, and certainly there was considerable clerical involvement in the advocacy of deaf education in Catholic France, but with the emphasis on reading, speaking and hearing, it could feasibly be argued that deaf people were more disabled under the new system, especially when the Evangelical revival insisted on the individual's engagement with scriptural texts.

Meanwhile, Enlightenment developments across Europe alienated deaf people from society (increasingly normalised as able-bodied) in other ways. The sensational discovery of the 'savage of Aveyron', a 'wild' boy, aphasic and possibly deaf, who lived 'naked' in the woods until he was eventually captured, examined and displayed, raised fears about 'primitive' Europeans at a time when 'savagery' was being increasingly located overseas.¹⁹ The link drawn in western philosophy between language and thought meant that without speech, deaf people were imagined unable to think, reason, or engage in religious thought.²⁰ W. Roe, the Head Master at the Midland Deaf and Dumb Institution, was typical in his belief that deaf people 'can only cry, like the dumb brute, to make their pains and wishes known'.²¹

It was the fear that deaf people could not know the 'truths of religion', be members of the Church, or go to heaven, that motivated the Abbé l'Epée to develop in France what is widely considered the foundations of deaf education in western Europe in the late eighteenth century.²² Sign language should be used, he argued, to teach 'the mysteries of religion', and ensure that upon death 'the spiritual aids which Christ has provided for our salvation can save them, redeem them, and admit them to eternal bliss at last'.²³ Yet, in Britain, continuing arguments as to the possibilities and limitations of signing provoked further questions about deaf religiosity. What were popularly dismissed as 'gestures' were acknowledged to convey the rudiments of human communication, but deemed unable to represent the abstract or spiritual.²⁴

By the nineteenth century, deafness not only carried the figurative association with 'heathenism', but the 'deaf and dumb' were literally feared to be un-Christian. The 'Deaf, who on that account do not attend Church' were an identifiable community unable to hear the Word of God.²⁵ Their perceived lack of subjectivity was troubling: if those 'without a voice' could not reason,

could they exercise free will, or even believe in God? Issues of interpretation abounded as to whether deaf people could be considered part of the Christian community, or, among other things, understand marriage vows.²⁶

Charles Orpen, the Secretary to the Deaf and Dumb Institution at Claremont in Dublin, and son of a Protestant vicar, powerfully connected the irreligion of the deaf and dumb with difference in his 1828 book, *The Contrast Between Atheism, Paganism and Christianity Illustrated. Or, the Uneducated Deaf and Dumb as Heathens Compared with Those who have been Instructed*. The deaf child is ‘thrown at once to an almost immeasurable distance from all other men’, he wrote, ‘inferior immensely to those who should be his equals, dependent entirely upon those about him’, ‘wholly ignorant of HIM’ and living ‘without the hopes and prospects and consolation of religion’.²⁷ Mr Gordon, a teacher of the deaf writing three years later, also framed deaf people as suffering beings needing rescue, again focusing specifically on the ‘uneducated’ deaf. The ‘uneducated deaf mute’, he wrote, ‘must be forever excluded in this life...doomed to pine away his years in solitary misery, incapable of ameliorating his condition in the slightest degree by any exertions of his own’. Typically, Gordon linked the striking passivity of these people with transgression and social exclusion. Ignoring the varied and often effective means of communication deaf and hearing people improvised at community levels, he depicted deaf people as thoroughly isolated from human contact. When finding that ‘his rude language of gestures’ was ‘ill-adapted’ to communicating ‘with his family or his neighbours’, Gordon believed, ‘continual vexations soon call up the evil passions in his breast’ and ‘as is generally the case where the impetus to virtue, religious instruction, is wanting’ and one was ‘ignorant’ of ‘all the great truths of natural and revealed religion’, a ‘propensity to evil’ had ‘full scope’.²⁸ Irreligion was crucial in constructing discursively and, through missionary activity, literally organising deaf people as a social group in this crucial time for the development of the disabled subject. Scriptural imagery, practical forms of religious exclusion, the undermining of deaf subjectivity, critiques of sign language and pity for their ‘heathenism’ all marked deaf people as religious others.

Impious and impure: gendering irreligion

Like other ‘irreligious’ people and social deviates, the alterity of deaf people intersected with an expectation that they transgressed accepted gendered norms; irreligion, like religiosity, is gendered, particularly around issues of sexuality. At the same time, the sexuality of people with disabilities was also a source of considerable anxiety in other quarters. Throughout the century, the marriage of deaf people was represented critically. By the 1870s, the question of deaf reproduction was a central concern for both the medical community and eugenicists, such as Alexander Graham Bell, terrified that ‘inter-marriage’ between deaf adults would create a ‘deaf variety of the human race’.²⁹ As

Martha Stoddard Holmes has demonstrated, disabled people were desexualised and infantilised in much Victorian literature.³⁰ Yet in religious narratives and in court records, deaf women could be constructed as promiscuous, easily ‘seduced’, and prone to bearing illegitimate children; transgressions seen both as manifestations of existing spiritual weakness, and as immoral acts in themselves.

Charles Orpen used the common motif of the seduced ‘deaf and dumb girl’, religiously ignorant, and therefore immoral, to a striking degree both in the aforementioned treatise and elsewhere. In a lengthy article in the *Dublin Penny Journal* entitled ‘Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb’, he produced an extraordinary litany of such cases.³¹ His first account was of a ‘deaf and dumb girl’ living in Paris who was ‘seduced’, condemned by her household, and because, owing to her deafness, ‘she knew of no judgement after death’, flung herself from an upstairs window. ‘Thus’ Orpen wrote, ‘perished the mother and her child together, the innocent, and the ignorantly guilty’, deaths which cried aloud ‘for vengeance against the seducer, and for shame upon those who left her so long uneducated’.³² He swiftly moved onto a second ‘deaf and dumb woman’, this time Irish, who had also been ‘seduced’ and ‘deserted’. Ruined, Orpen wrote that the woman ‘now revels in unhallowed drunkenness and debauchery’, living, he implied, as a sex-worker. Orpen’s judgement on this case was no less candid: ‘that this has ever occurred, and that our deaf and dumb fellow-creature, and fellow-citizen, has been thus degraded, to be the servile instrument of sin, and debased to purposes of the vilest and most vicious dishonour, has been our fault’. Furthermore, this was not an isolated example, Orpen insisted, but a ‘type of many’.³³ Indeed, he produced a third ‘instance of the effect of the neglect of deaf and dumb females’ in which a young ‘deaf and dumb’ woman, ‘ignorant of God’, was seduced by a servant. Unaware of the ‘sin attached to her state’, she was punished by her father and locked in a room alone where both she and the baby died during the birth. The motto of this story was unequivocal: ‘had she been taught to read, and to understand the Scriptures, she never would have been in this state’.³⁴

Orpen’s accounts are evocative of other stories of exploited young women, typical of the urban rescue narratives of the later nineteenth century. But interestingly Orpen wholly explains the cases by what he called ‘the peculiar dangers to which female mutes are exposed when unguarded by education and religion’. Significantly, when considering the rapid development of deaf education it was, at least for Orpen (a key player in its establishment in Ireland), this moral vulnerability that provided the ‘imperative duty to extend the means of all deaf and dumb institutions’ particularly for women and girls.³⁵ In casting the responsibility for these tragedies on the public, Orpen repeatedly tied issues of religion and gender together: ‘Let the public... believe me, that the evil of neglecting the education of deaf and dumb girls is

productive of inconceivable villainy and vice, even before they have attained the age of womanhood.’³⁶ Orpen was far from alone in these constructions. Jane Groom, an advocate for the deaf poor in London and a deaf woman herself, also wrote of the ‘very great temptations and evils’ facing ‘deaf and dumb working women and girls’ which ‘their unfortunate afflictions render them powerless to fight against’.³⁷ Deaf women were thus constructed as peculiarly susceptible, and the ‘deaf and dumb girl’, like some racial and class ‘others’, a more vulnerable *sort* of woman.

It may be noted that two of the examples above not only involved illegitimate conception, but also the loss of the foetus or new-born child, thereby curtailing the extent to which these women were also represented as ‘mothers’. Maternity was another gendered role that was considered incompatible with deafness, and anxiety around deaf maternity ran from fears that a deaf mother would be unable to hear her baby cry, to allegations of infanticide. Alongside Orpen’s discussions of exploited women, he also outlined the trial of a ‘deaf and dumb’ Glaswegian, Jane Campbell, for the murder of her child. The woman was, again, reported to have been ‘betrayed and deserted’ and left with a young infant who, it was alleged, she had killed. The court found that, rather than intentionally throwing the child from a bridge, as charged, she had ‘forgot the child for a moment’, and ‘incautiously’ dropped it into the river.³⁸ While cleared of murder, the woman’s ‘natural’ ability to nurture was presented as deficient, a failing attributed to her deafness.

Anxieties about deaf maternity and infanticide can be seen yet more clearly in the court proceedings and press coverage of the 1830s trial of Esther Dyson, a ‘deaf and dumb woman’ from the Yorkshire village of Ecclesfield accused of infanticide.³⁹ Press reports of the trial make it clear that even before the birth, Dyson’s neighbours had assumed that she would not understand the meaning of her pregnancy. Unmarried, Dyson had lived alone with her brother, who was also deaf. Her neighbours observed a ‘change’ in her appearance and, using signs familiar in the community, attempted to ‘make her readily understand that she had but little time to make preparations for an offspring, shewing her their own children, and the necessary clothes provided for them’.⁴⁰ Dyson angrily dismissed their intrusions, which they interpreted as a refusal to acknowledge the pregnancy. In October 1830, Dyson was linked with the decapitated body of a female baby found in a nearby river.

The trial that ensued was much publicised and Esther’s contributions in sign language attracted considerable interest. Her brother was dismissed from the court, the jury believing that, although he shared a small attic bedroom with Esther, ‘he was not, owing to his natural infirmities, acquainted with her situation’, nor was he suspected of being the father.⁴¹ After much discussion as to whether Dyson was able to understand either the events around the birth of her child, or the legal processes, it was decided that her deafness and

aphasia rendered her 'insane'. This was a verdict that baffled her neighbours who had always found Dyson to be both sane and, in sign, comprehensible.⁴² On this ground she was found 'Not Guilty', and escaped the death sentence to spend the next ten years in the West Riding Pauper Asylum, where, removed from her language-community, she became 'violent' and depressed.⁴³

Linking deafness with insanity was very common in the nineteenth century, when, due to their perceived lack of language, deaf people were claimed to be unable to 'reason'.⁴⁴ Associations were also commonly drawn between infanticide and mental health disorder.⁴⁵ But it is interesting that here deafness was argued to have rendered both brother and sister, in different ways, incapable of understanding the very concept of motherhood. Such stories seemed to suggest that it was unnatural for deaf women to become mothers and that deaf men would not understand pregnancy, maternity, nor, by extension, fatherhood.

As in the case of Dyson's brother, deaf men were also constructed as incapable of 'proper' parenthood and considered neither to want children nor be able to support a family financially. Accounts written by newly educated deaf people contributed to these constructions. In one example, William James, a deaf American, was quoted as saying:

I had never wanted to be a man, because I could do enough what I liked to. I seldom saw a baby. I hated it and thought it a dirty thing. I have still retained the dislike for babies. (I am single.)⁴⁶

The perceived emasculation of deaf men was a different kind of gendered 'problem' with religious and moral implications. In industrial Britain, anyone who was not identified as a young, able-bodied, white male was to some extent 'othered'. Deaf men, especially those who were uneducated, were repeatedly constructed as enfeebled mentally, spiritually and physically. 'Its heart is chilled and its mind enfeebled', W. Roe wrote of the deaf person. 'Only under suitable instruction' he continued 'can the deaf mute become anything but a burden to others and to himself.'⁴⁷ Whatever the intended distinctions between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving poor', the apparent reliance of deaf people on 'rate-payers' through their institutionalisation in workhouses and asylums was a source of grievance.⁴⁸ As has been widely established in studies of nineteenth-century masculinity, work was a fundamental part of Christian manhood.⁴⁹ Without religion, it was thus reasoned, deaf people would not understand the moral value of work. The founders of the Asylum for the Maintenance and Education of the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor in London, wove seamlessly between work and Christianity in their lament that, if only the deaf could be educated 'many who have led a life of idleness and ignorance, might have been rendered materially useful – their minds enlightened by the sacred scriptures and society benefited by the fruits of their industry'.⁵⁰

The deaf-mute's faith

Over the course of the century, Christian philanthropic attempts to 'save' deaf people from irreligion, and enlightenment desires to 'civilise' them out of 'ignorance', materialised in the rapid spread of missions, benevolent institutions and educative asylums to introduce deaf people to 'the Word' both spoken and scriptural.⁵¹ The fundraising materials for these institutions, their representation in the press, and in pamphlets about deaf education, both reinforced the association between irreligion and deafness, and added a new element: deaf people may usually be impious and impure, but, when educated, they were peculiarly pious and religious people. These near-saintly images, although in contradiction to representations of 'heathenish' deaf people discussed earlier, worked with them to provide a context by which deaf people continued to be read through a heightened moral frame.

Religion was at the heart of institutions for the deaf, both those that were explicitly 'missions' and those that were simply named 'schools' or 'asylums'. A deputation into such institutions in 1856 was 'gratified' to find that without exception all the institutions visited were 'founded on Christian principles', 'maintained by funds contributed through Christian benevolence' and demanded their pupils study 'a selected portion of God's Word' each day.⁵² Daily prayers, Scriptural study, Sabbath observance and public worship all featured in different combinations as part of the institutions' weekly routines. As much as providing the pupils with an education, their time at deaf institutions was intended to bring about their moral development.

Daily life in deaf institutions was also structured by gender and the desire that 'deaf and dumb' children became 'properly' gendered. As in other schools, what students were taught, particularly practical skills, was rigidly divided into boys' subjects and girls' ones. In the Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, a workshop was fitted to allow boys to be instructed in carpentry; while girls were taught dressmaking and needlework.⁵³ Careful thought was also given to the degree of interaction permitted between male and female students (unsurprising given the concerns around deaf sexuality discussed above). Most institutions favoured keeping students 'strictly apart' aside from during lessons and mealtimes (where supervision was at its most stringent); a system followed by institutions in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Brighton, Doncaster, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Belfast and believed to facilitate 'self-control' and 'habitual decency of thought, manner and expression'.⁵⁴ The organisation of space inscribed a complex hierarchy in which gender, age, class and disability intersected. In one institution, there were three staircases: one for the (hearing) masters and private students; one for the (deaf) teaching assistants and charity-funded students; and a third for the girls and servants.

The representations of 'the deaf and dumb' that emerged from these

institutions, widely circulated in fundraising material for them, suggest that these interventions were successful. Indeed, more than successful, for the images of deaf people who were reformed and educated are presented as exemplary figures. Like the literature produced by missionary societies working with the 'heathen' overseas or with the working class at home, mini-biographies of converted deaf people, particularly children, were also popular. Examples of deaf devotion became a new and widespread trope. Roe's *Anecdotes of the Deaf and Dumb*, for example, contained articles entitled 'A Happy Death Bed', 'The Converted Mute' and 'The Deaf Mute's Faith', each of which constructed converted and educated deaf people as pious and pure.⁵⁵ *Voice from the Dumb*, a commemoration of John Lashford, a pupil of the Brighton and Sussex Institution of the Deaf and Dumb, written by his headmaster, William Sleight, is an extended and particularly striking example of this genre.⁵⁶ Using a heightened sentimental discourse which verges on Christian melodrama, Sleight tells of Lashford's quiet but steadfast devotion, quotes from his letters (which exclusively concentrate on the Bible), and records his impeccable Victorian death at the age of seventeen.

Published poetry about deaf people also emphasised the transformative effect of education and religious training. A typical poem, entitled 'The Deaf and Dumb Christian', compared medical deafness with spiritual hearing, commencing:

Jesus I cannot hear
My earthly teacher's voice;
But Thou dost whisper in mine ear,
And make my heart rejoice
Ah! once that heart was dumb,
And deaf to thee my soul;
But Thou in tender love didst come
And make my spirit whole.⁵⁷

The sentimentality of such images is reminiscent of Martha Stoddard Holmes's work on the gendering of 'the afflicted' in Victorian fiction.⁵⁸ As Holmes demonstrates, disability was a formative element of Victorian sentimental writing and Christian melodrama, while fiction provided strict and limited narratives for the way in which disability should be performed. In such writing, people with disabilities can only be accepted as particularly 'good' people and heroic 'overcomers', images which permeated and limited public understandings of 'appropriate' responses to impairment and have continued to do so. As Holmes for British and Mary Klages for American literature demonstrate, gender and disability did not just vary fictional constructions of Victorian sentimentality, they were absolutely pivotal to its

structure.⁵⁹ Similar traits and implications can be seen in contemporary discussions of deafness well beyond the literary representations which Klages and Holmes explore.

The performance of deaf religiosity was itself of interest. *The Pictorial World* wrote of how, in Saint Saviour's Church (established for the deaf in 1875), 'every Sunday the curious may witness the "silent Services"', the interpreter William Stainer's 'quick, almost magical movements of the fingers'. Framing the service in terms of a spectacle for the hearing, the author continued:

It is a sight, and a sight worth travelling eastwards for, to watch the solemnly-seriously but uncommonly sharp expression of intelligence and attention in the eyes and the faces of the deaf and dumb worshippers as they follow the fingers and watch the ever-changing countenance of their instructor; the quick sign of comprehension when struck by any passage; the strong, earnest look of devotion as they join in mute prayer.⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, given the power of irreligion as a means of othering 'the deaf and dumb', religion also became a key area through which deaf people challenged and contested hearing representations of them. Medical historian Neil Pemberton has usefully located deaf agency within the missions, arguing that some deaf people were able to use missions as spaces in which to form collective identities, based around the perceived 'holiness' of sign language as a 'natural language', close to God and 'untainted' by the curse of the Tower of Babel.⁶¹ The converted and educated deaf could also become missionaries themselves, and active participants in an emergent deaf community. Such an argument is important, especially in challenging representations of deaf people as passive recipients of hearing benevolence. But assessing deaf agency is difficult, and often filtered out when examples of deaf religiosity were repackaged for hearing consumption. One popular form of representation used in fundraising material for deaf missions was through the careful framing of writing produced by former pupils of these institutions. Alongside Orpen's numerous images of deaf girls as sexually exploited 'pitiable objects', he produced one such example of 'the Educated Deaf and Dumb': a 'young lady' at an American deaf institution who in response to the question 'What are the ornaments of the female character?' replied in exemplary form: 'Modesty, humility, and discretion'.⁶² British Institutions produced similar material. One publication, *Essays by the Pupils at the College of the Deaf and Dumb, Rugby*, contained compositions entitled: 'Industry'; 'Religion: its Object and Affect [sic] on Individuals and Communities'; 'Upon the Moral Condition of the Deaf and Dumb Before Education'; 'What is Conversion?'; and 'Benevolence'.⁶³ Each essay demonstrated that the educated deaf would, at least rhetorically, conform to both religious and gender ideals.

But, in the same way that deaf people were presented as exceptionally

religious, their otherness is similarly maintained in representations of their gender. What it meant to be 'properly' gendered, as well as what it meant to be a 'good Christian', was altered by deafness. For example, images of deaf Christians are all strikingly celibate. This is not surprising in this kind of literature, except that it seems to extend to a preclusion of motherhood (and indeed fatherhood), discourses which were at the heart of missions overseas where the training of girls to be mothers was of utmost importance. While deaf girls may have been trained to some extent in sewing, cleaning and cooking, this was very much in the expectation that they could do such work to support themselves as single women, not to marry and make a home of their own. In the literature about deaf women, the stories of unmarried mothers and murderous deaf mothers, do not find a counterpoint in images of married, maternal figures, who have been 'taught' the value of motherhood, as are found in depictions of converted 'natives' in missionary work overseas which shared ideological and even institutional links with missions to deaf people back in Britain.⁶⁴

Writing of deafness in a contemporary context, deaf critic and commentator Tanis Doe has noted that 'in almost all English literature the 'Deaf' are referred to without gender'. Instead we discuss 'the Deaf', 'the Deaf Community', 'members of Deaf culture', 'Deaf students', 'Deaf adults', 'children with hearing impairments' all terms which give no 'indication of gender'. In many cases, she suggests, 'being Deaf serves as a master status which eclipses other social categories'.⁶⁵ Doe ascribes such grammar to the placing of deaf boys and girls in residential schools which operate as 'total institutions' in their socialisation, processes which were also in effect in nineteenth-century deaf institutions, many of which similarly isolated their 'inmates' from hearing people and culture. But nineteenth-century discourses, which left little room for positive images of deaf reproduction or independence, were no doubt also important in framing these identities which all too obviously have lingering legacies today.

Deaf people were presented in a morally loaded way, in which religion and gender intersect. In some representations, the idealised image of the Christian deaf woman is a frail, celibate, childless, dependent figure, suffering without complaint. There are images of deaf men as educated, religious and hardworking. But many representations of deaf people are all but without obvious masculine and feminine traits at all: 'the deaf and dumb' are referred to as a single category. While gender deviance was used to mark the otherness of deaf people, in images of 'reformed' deaf people, the intersection between disability and gender often seems to prioritise disability at the expense of gender. Disability is suggested to undermine gendered identities not only in the irreligious deaf but also in aspirations for those who had been reformed. Images of deaf people as either 'heathen' deviants, or flawless sufferers, both contributed to their framing around a heightened morality and their

problematic relationship with sexuality; both extremes served to mark 'difference'.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the intersections between religion, gender and disability as corroborates of identity and categories of difference in nineteenth-century discussions of the deaf. Although disabled people were 'othered' in the nineteenth century, and the place occupied by disability in contemporary historiography was marginal, much can be gained from 'mainstreaming' its impact on Victorian culture, as Julia Rodas puts it.⁶⁶ While my study focuses on deaf people, and there is insufficient historical work to make meaningful comparison with differently disabled populations, many of my arguments speak to issues of disability more broadly. In particular, I have identified four ways in which including disability may shape our discussion of gender and religion.

First, I have argued that religious discourses are constitutive of difference, of gender difference and of the difference represented by disability. Like gender, disability is an axis of difference, a means through which to establish hierarchy, and a discursive structure based on ideas about embodiment. Protestant Christianity forged discourses where ideas about disability could be articulated and provided institutional forums through which projects around deafness could be mobilised. Christianity's foundational texts shaped the moral codes through which ideas about impairment were filtered. Although many discourses of deafness constructed deaf people as unable to be Christian, when they were educated they were often represented as exceptionally pious people and as 'unnaturally' good. This also, is a discourse of otherhood.

Second, I have argued that the body is a way of experiencing and practising religion. The Protestant Reformation's insistence on reading, speaking and hearing, meant deaf people were more disabled under the new system, especially as the Evangelical revival insisted on the individual's engagements with scriptural texts. On the other hand, signing was often claimed by deaf people to be a 'natural language', closer to God than spoken ones.⁶⁷ In nineteenth-century Britain, the body and soul were closely connected theologically and imaginatively. The body cannot be detached from religious experience, religion is experienced through the body and the kind of body shapes the way in which religion is felt and practised.

My third argument has been that understandings of both religious observance and religious deviance were gendered. The perceived irreligion of deaf people intersected with an expectation that they transgressed accepted gendered norms, particularly around issues of sexuality. Deaf women were represented as promiscuous and incapable of good motherhood, while deaf men were

represented as effeminate and unmanly. Educating deaf people and converting them religiously also meant ‘correcting’ this gendered behaviour. The deaf missions that were increasingly established during the nineteenth century were concerned with gender training, and images of ‘reformed’ deaf women depicted them repeating doctrines of female modesty and deference.

Lastly I have argued that identities are contingent and intersectional. When identities of religion, gender and disability coincide, they change, they do not simply compile. While there are many similarities between images of ‘reformed’ deaf people and those of other converted ‘heathens’ from abroad or the lower classes, what it meant to be ‘properly’ gendered, as well as what it meant to be a ‘good Christian’ was altered by the presence of disability. The registering of disability as ‘different’ disturbed gender boundaries, and did so in conversation with discourses of Protestant morality; tropes of asexuality and the refusal of deaf maternity are powerful examples of this. The disabled person, and the peculiar gendering of that person, was a central figure in many religious constructions prolific in nineteenth-century Britain. Taking images of deaf people into account does not simply provide more examples of common religious and gender tropes, but alters and disrupts them. Putting disability into the picture allows us to think about the implications of the embodiment of religion and gender on these categories, and the broader construction of ‘difference’.

Notes

I am very grateful to Daniel Grey and Mary Vincent for their insights on this chapter, as well as to David Cleall, Erin Cullen, Joanna de Groot, Sue Morgan and the anonymous reviewer for their help in revising it.

- 1 *Account of the General Institution Established in Birmingham, for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Children* (Birmingham: J. Ferrall, 1814), p. 3.
- 2 *Account of the General Institution*, pp. 3–10.
- 3 Although activists have questioned whether sign-language users are best understood as a group defined by ‘disability’ or ‘ethnicity’, here I discuss deafness as ‘disability’ because, in the nineteenth century, labelling deafness an ‘infirmity’ was crucial to its construction.
- 4 Sarah Chinn, ‘Gender, Sex, and Disability, from Helen Keller to Tiny Tim’, *Radical History Review* 94 (2006), pp. 240–48, here p. 242.
- 5 Rosmarie Garland-Thompson, ‘Feminist Disability Studies: A Review Essay’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (2005), pp. 1557–87.

- 6 After considerable thought, I have decided to include the phrase ‘deaf and dumb’ throughout this article. While the negative connotations that the phrase ‘deaf and dumb’ now holds make its use problematic, it was the label through which the new category I analyse was defined and, because I am exploring deafness as a social rather than a medical construct, the original framing is important. Lack of speech was essential to the categorisation of deafness and the label was deliberately intended to exclude those discussed today as ‘hard of hearing’ or adults with hearing loss later in life, who identified simply as ‘deaf’. Similarly, I have not distinguished grammatically between ‘Deaf’ as an identity and ‘deaf’ as an adjective here because of the problems applying late twentieth-century categories retrospectively to a period when many people identified more ambivalently with concepts of deafness.
- 7 Frederick Roden, ‘Gender and Religion in Recent Victorian Studies Publications’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31 (2003), pp. 393–403.
- 8 Catherine Kudlick, ‘Disability History: Why We Need Another “Other”’, *American Historical Review* 108 (2003), pp. 763–93.
- 9 In the case of the US, e.g., Douglas Baynton makes a similar point about Christianity being the focus around which deaf ‘otherness’ was constructed. Douglas Baynton, “‘A Silent Exile on this Earth’: The Metaphorical Construction of Deafness in the Nineteenth Century”, *American Quarterly* 44 (1992), pp. 216–43.
- 10 Quantifying deafness is difficult due to changing terminology, shifting measurements of hearing loss, and the lack of correspondence between degree of hearing loss and its resulting social impact. The 1891 Census recorded 29,280 deaf people (1 in every 1,008 males and 1 in 975 females), but officials believed the condition to be significantly under-reported due to social stigma and denial and often only recorded at all if both congenital *and* accompanied by the lack of speech. Certainly deafness was more common in the nineteenth century than it is in contemporary Britain (approximately 1.4% of the population) due to higher rates of illnesses causing deafness (scarlet fever, mumps, chicken pox, influenza, measles, encephalitis, meningitis, rubella etc.) Audio-enhancing technology was also poor quality and prohibitively expensive.
- 11 John Ackers, ‘Historical Notes on the Education of the Deaf’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 (1880), pp. 163–71, here p. 164.
- 12 Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Health, Medicine and Society in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009), p. 115.
- 13 Jan Branson and Don Miller, *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet

- 14 Candida Moss and Jeremy Schipper (eds), *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).
- 15 C. P. Donald Senior, 'Beware of the Canaanite Woman: Disability and the Bible', in Marilyn Bishop (ed.), *Religion and Disability. Essays in Scripture, Theology and Ethics* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), pp. 1–26, here p. 12.
- 16 For blindness, see Carpenter, *Health, Medicine and Society*, pp. 128–48. See also Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
- 17 Emily Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England', *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), pp. 493–510, here p. 496.
- 18 It should, however, be noted that in a recent study Matthew Milner argues the extent of this transition has been over emphasised. Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).
- 19 Murray Simpson, 'From Savage to Citizen: Education, Colonialism and Idiocy', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 28 (2007), pp. 561–74.
- 20 Jonathan Rée, *I See A Voice. Language, Deafness and the Senses: A Philosophical History* (London: Harper Collins, 1999).
- 21 W. R. Roe, *Anecdotes & Incidents of the Deaf & Dumb* (Derby: Francis Carter, 1886), p. 3.
- 22 Rée, *I See a Voice*, p. 151.
- 23 Abée L'Epée, quoted in Rée, *I See a Voice*, p. 152.
- 24 Rée, *I See a Voice*, p. 152.
- 25 Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), *To the Deaf Who on that Account do not Attend Church* (London: SPCK, 1864).
- 26 See e.g., the case of Giles Blunt who, his father argued, could not have understood 'what he did when he joined hands with the woman', and could not, therefore, be held responsible for the maintenance of his son. Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf', p. 505.
- 27 Charles Orpen, *The Contrast Between Atheism, Paganism and Christianity Illustrate. Or the Uneducated Deaf and Dumb as Heathens Compared with Those who have been Instructed in Language and Revelation and Taught by the Holy Spirit as Christians* (Dublin: Goodwin, 1828).
- 28 Mr Gordon, *Art of Instructing the Deaf and Dumb with Remarks on*

- Existing Institutions for their Relief* (Dublin: O'Flanagan, 1831).
- 29 Alexander Graham Bell, *Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race* (New Haven: National Academy of Sciences, 1883).
- 30 Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).
- 31 Charles Orphen, 'Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb', *Dublin Penny Journal*, 4/196 (2 April 1836), pp. 313–19.
- 32 Orphen, 'Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb', pp. 315–16.
- 33 Orphen, 'Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb', p. 316.
- 34 Orphen, 'Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb', pp. 316–7.
- 35 Orphen, 'Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb', p. 317.
- 36 Orphen, 'Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb', p. 318.
- 37 H. H., *An Evangelist Among the Deaf and Dumb* (privately published, 1884). My thanks to David Cleall for alerting me to this source.
- 38 H. H., *An Evangelist*, p. 317.
- 39 My thanks to Daniel Grey for the invaluable notes on the assize trial documentation for this case.
- 40 *Sheffield Independent, and Yorkshire and Derbyshire Advertiser* (2 October 1830).
- 41 *Sheffield Independent, and Yorkshire and Derbyshire Advertiser* (2 October 1830).
- 42 National Archives, Kew, ASSI 45/63. *R. v. Dyson*.
- 43 Kate Mattacks, "'Natural Pantomime", Spectacle, Silence and Speech Disability', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 37 (2010), pp. 33–34.
- 44 Reé, *I See A Voice*.
- 45 Daniel J. R. Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England, 1880–1922' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Roehampton University, 2008), pp. 201–61.
- 46 William James, 'Thought Before Language: A Deaf-Mute's Recollections', *Philosophical Review* 1 (1892), pp. 613–24, here p. 622.
- 47 Roe, *Anecdotes & Incidents*, p. 3. See also Anon. 'The Ages of Deaf Mutes', reproduced in Roe, p. 117.
- 48 Anon., 'How to Save the Rates', in Roe, *Anecdotes & Incidents*, p. 6.

- 49 John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Harlow: Longman, 2005).
- 50 *Asylum for the Maintenance and Education of the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor, Instituted 1792* (London, 1795), English Short Title Catalogue Citation no. T219478.
- 51 Neil Pemberton, 'Holiness, Civilisation and the Victorian Deaf: A Social History of Signing and Speech in Late Victorian England, 1865–95' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2004), p. 31.
- 52 John Ringland and John Gelston, *Report of a Deputation from the National Association for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb Poor of Ireland who visited several Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb in Great Britain* (Dublin: National Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor in Ireland, 1856), pp. 43–4.
- 53 *Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, School for Children and Training College for Teachers, Report 1895* (London: Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, 1896).
- 54 Ringland and Gelston, *Report of a Deputation*, pp. 16–19.
- 55 Roe, *Anecdotes & Incidents*, pp. 12, 35, 71.
- 56 William Sleight, *A Voice from the Dumb: A Memoir of John William Lashford, Late a Pupil in the Brighton and Sussex Institution for the Deaf and Dumb* (1849).
- 57 W. R. Roe (ed.), *Poems on the Deaf & Dumb* (Derby: Francis Carter, 1888).
- 58 Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*.
- 59 Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*; Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*.
- 60 *Pictorial World*, 'At Church with the Deaf and Dumb', reproduced in *A Magazine of Interest Chiefly for the Deaf and Dumb*, February 1875, pp. 24–7.
- 61 Pemberton, 'Holiness'; Neil Pemberton, 'Deafness and Holiness Home Missions: Deaf Congregations, and Natural Language 1860–1890', *Victorian Review* 35/2 (2009), pp. 65–82, here p. 67.
- 62 Orpen, 'Anecdotes', p. 318.
- 63 *Essays by the Pupils at the College of the Deaf and Dumb, Rugby* (London: Longman, 1845).
- 64 The SPCK circulated its educational literature to deaf children in Britain as

well as to hearing people overseas, as did The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). For more on gender in missions overseas, see Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Otherness in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

- 65 Tanis Doe, 'The Social Construction of Deaf Women', *Women's Education des Femmes*, 12/2 (1996), <http://www.nald.ca/litweb/other/cclow/newslet/1999/sprng_v13/83.htm>.
- 66 Julia Rodas, 'Mainstreaming Disability Studies?', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 44 (2006), pp. 371–84.
- 67 Pemberton, 'Deafness and Holiness'.

PART III

Religion, Gender and Sexuality

The Sexual Shame of the Chaste: 'Abortion Miracles' in Early Medieval Saints' Lives

Zubin Mistry

In the early Middle Ages, gender distinctions commonly expressed ideas of polarity and hierarchy. In one widely circulated Latin etymology, man (*vir*) derived from strength (*virtus*) and woman (*mulier*) from softness (*mollities*). *Virtus* and *mollities* denoted moral as much as physical difference; as one notable source for the commonplace emphasised, this difference justified the subjection of woman to man.¹ But the history of medieval gender is not straightforwardly the story of a stable system of polarity, hierarchy and subjugation. Gender was amenable to varying ends and interacted with different political, social and religious impulses.

Some medieval historians have drawn attention to the complexity of medieval gender by identifying distinct groups which did not conform to conventional roles, from late Roman and Byzantine court eunuchs to thirteenth-century dowagers, as third genders.² Like recent work on medieval masculinities, the interest in putative medieval third genders is a gauge of medieval historians' evolving study and use of gender in ways which increasingly sharpen the distinction between the history of gender and women's history.³ The interaction between gender and religion in medieval thought and practice has also been a rich, if still developing, forum and here, too, historians have identified third genders. For the early Middle Ages, Jo Ann McNamara has argued that 'monastic theorists tended to conceptualize a third gender, apart from the two sexually active genders'. This third gender enacted a 'spiritual parity' which did not endure beyond the earlier centuries of monasticism.⁴ If not all historians have found it germane to see the clergy or religious in this way, this is not because of a lack of critical interest in the interaction between gender and religion. Ruth Mazo Karras has seen fit to apply Ockham's razor, arguing that 'genders should not be multiplied beyond necessity' in her own analysis of the distinctiveness of post-Gregorian clerical masculinity.⁵

Whether or not early medieval monks, nuns and, more complicatedly, clerics constituted a third gender, the ideologies and practicalities governing religious and clerical life distinguished them from the laity. Their lives were defined, in part, by the mundane and celestial possibilities opened up by religious profession, and also by the different routes which men and women took

towards this goal. The memory of what these men and women relinquished was not entirely forgotten in the delineation of their new roles and the gender permutations of religious life found varied expression. In the thought of the Anglo-Saxon monastic theorist Aldhelm (c.639–709), for example, religious men and women partook, in Emma Pettit's words, of a 'shared invisible spiritual identity heavily indebted to masculinity'. Monks and nuns alike were enjoined to contend 'manfully' (*viriliter*) in the battle against vices. The visible dimensions of religious life, however, from dress to demeanour, retained clear gender distinctions, and for Aldhelm the transition to religious life entailed a more dramatic break for men than for women.⁶ Elsewhere, hagiographers drew on different models of sanctity in characterising the transition to female religious life, from the transcending of gender through virile asceticism to the transformation of gender through spiritualised motherhood. Often, as Simon Coates has shown in his study of the *vitae* of the sixth-century abbess Radegund of Poitiers, hagiographers blended elements from these models.⁷

Across the diversity of early medieval models of sanctity (and their modern interpretations), chastity was a crucial sign of religious distinction. But chastity was also fragile, an 'unstable condition and easily lost among the pitfalls of the world'.⁸ From early Christianity onwards, sexual lapses were rude reminders to individuals and communities of the gender roles which religious orientation sought to reconfigure. When, in the early third century, Tertullian critiqued an emergent custom in Carthage for virgins who had renounced marriage to stand unveiled in church, he noted acerbically that after uncovering their heads many ended up covering their bellies in shame or resorting to abortion to prevent public disclosure of sexual sin.⁹ From punitive retribution to the remedy of penance, responses to such lapses endeavoured to recover the communal experience of chastity and to contain the turbulence of sexual sin in communities of the chaste.

This article focuses on questions of chastity and sexual sin in examining an unusual 'abortion miracle' motif in the Latin hagiography of early medieval Ireland. It is found in the *vitae* of Brigit of Kildare and two male saints, Áed mac Bricc and Cainnech of Aghaboe: the saint encounters a nun who has breached her vow to chastity and become pregnant but, through the saint's intervention, the pregnancy miraculously disappears. The motif has not been as thoroughly scrutinised as other episodes in Irish hagiography. David Herlihy situated the miracle in the interplay between native paganism and nascent Christianisation. For Herlihy, such stories glistened with the 'aura of archaism' from a 'strange, occasionally savage world, still largely influenced by traditional heathen customs, still only slightly touched by a crude Christianity'.¹⁰ Other readings have focused on attitudes to abortion and the lives of early medieval women. Noting that 'abortion took place, if not commonly, then at least often enough to appear without comment in both

secular and ecclesiastical sources', Lisa Bitel has suggested that such miracles reflect a 'blasé attitude toward abortion'.¹¹ Most recently, Maeve Callan has argued that hagiographic depictions of 'abortionist saints', virginal restoration and the birth of Irish saints from incestuous or illegitimate unions 'reflect a remarkably permissive attitude toward...traditionally taboo acts', an attitude shared by some prescriptive texts. Callan has also provided a gendered reading of the motif and the hagiographic handling of reproduction: male incursions into reproductive matters, like those of Áed and Cainnech, were failed attempts to appropriate control of a female zone of reproductive labour, in which women turned to other women for their needs, and prescriptive texts, which explicitly refer only to female abortionists, 'represent the morality of "ordinary" Irish Christians'.¹² While these readings, especially Callan's, are of much interest, the question of how the erasure of a nun's pregnancy could be represented as a mark of saintly sanctity has not been fully explored. This paper will approach the miracle lying at the heart of the motif in light of a critical juncture between early medieval gender and religion, namely the promotion and protection of chastity.

Early Irish hagiography

Irish saints' lives emerged in the seventh and eighth centuries, to which the *vitae* of three famous saints from the fourth to sixth centuries can be placed: two of Patrick, one of Columba and two of Brigit. The Brigidine *vitae* were one by Cogitosus (Cog.), a monk of Kildare, and the so-called *Vita Prima* (VP), which earns its name from the order in the Bollandists' early modern edition in the *Acta Sanctorum*. The Bollandists believed that it was the oldest Brigidine *vita*, a matter still debated among scholars. These early works each drew distinctively on some continental hagiography, scripture, apocrypha and secular stories to create narratives of Christian sanctity designed to resonate in Irish milieus.¹³

Hereafter, the picture becomes more complicated and the following summary leans towards simplification. In subsequent centuries, *vitae* of new saintly subjects, together with redactions of older *vitae*, were produced in Latin and, from around the ninth century, Old Irish. Beyond the earliest works, these Latin *vitae* have only survived in three later medieval compilations produced after the thirteenth century, which Richard Sharpe has called the Dublin, Salamanca and Oxford manuscripts in his fundamental study of early Irish hagiography. The two principal modern editions of these *vitae* draw differently on these compilations: Charles Plummer has edited the Dublin *vitae* (and unique Oxford ones) while William W. Heist has edited the Salamanca *vitae*.¹⁴ These editions contain different redactions of the *vitae* of Áed and Cainnech, including intriguing differences in the 'abortion miracle' motif.

Sharpe's study has established that, whereas the compiler of the Dublin manuscript often edited and amended material, the Salamanca codex was the work of a more conservative compiler. Thus the Salamanca codex (and Heist's edition) appears to contain some redactions of *vitae* which are older than their Dublin counterparts (and Plummer's edition). Further, Sharpe has argued that within the former, nine or ten *vitae* including those of Áed and Cainnech, the so-called O'Donohue group, named after a scribal annotation, represent an original collection which pre-dates the later compilation of the codex. The *vitae* in this group as preserved in the more conservative Salamanca codex, he argues, can plausibly be dated to c.800.¹⁵ This summary yields a tentative working chronology for the 'abortion miracle' motif from emergence and recycling to later dissipation. It probably originated in the earliest Brigidine *vitae* (or in a lost exemplar) in the seventh century; it was adapted in the *vitae* of Áed and Cainnech perhaps in the late eighth or ninth century; and it was subsequently amended or excised in some later redactions of all of these lives.

The Brigidine *vitae*

Brigit (c.452/6–524/6/8), abbess and founder of the influential monastery at Kildare, was one of the pre-eminent Irish saints.¹⁶ From the late nineteenth century, Brigit the saint became entwined with Brigit the goddess through a confluence of scholarly trends and their popular receptions. Brigit appealed to those interested in excavating the native mythologies of a putatively matriarchal prehistory and in exhuming personas around whom the energies of nationalist identity could coalesce.¹⁷ She endures as an icon in feminist spirituality and neo-paganism, epitomised by works such as Mary Condren's engaging but methodologically problematic study of Irish religious history.¹⁸

Brigit's enduring popularity demonstrates the possibilities for both convergence and divergence between scholarly and popular thought. As Christina Harrington has put it, 'in very few areas of modern life is scholarship so influential on so many people's daily religious life – but it is Victorian scholarship, not contemporary work'.¹⁹ Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, scholars have relocated almost all of the sources previously understood to contain layers of pre-Christian traditions within the distinct cultural dynamics of a Christianising early Ireland.²⁰ Scholars sometimes still use the goddess-saint connection to illuminate the Brigidine *vitae*; but their focus has shifted, if not entirely, to the forms, purposes and contexts of that distinctly Christian genre, the hagiographical *vita*, and away from the history of Brigit the saint in the fifth and sixth centuries or the prehistory of Brigit the goddess.

The 'abortion miracle' motif emerged, then, in texts with a vested interest in shaping the past for the present. The earliest texts to include the motif were Cogitosus's *vita* and the *Vita Prima*. The precise origin is unclear and no

comparable motif survives in earlier Christian literature.²¹ Whether it originated with Cogitosus's *vita*, which can be reasonably dated to c.680, the *Vita Prima*, which could pre-date Cogitosus or have been composed as late as c.800, or a now-lost *vita*, is uncertain.²²

Nonetheless, Cogitosus's *vita* is a useful starting point. Aside from a prologue outlining her career and extensive accounts of posthumous miracles, the bulk of this *vita* is comprised of short nature miracles: the diverting of rivers, relocation of trees and mastery over animals. A few miracles, however, touched on the promotion or protection of religious chastity. In one, Brigit cured a young girl born mute by asking her whether she wanted to become a veiled virgin or be given away in marriage. The girl's first utterance resonated with religious obedience: 'I do not want to do anything except what you want'.²³ In another, Brigit came to the aid of a 'chaste woman who was her follower'. After entrusting a silver brooch to this woman for safekeeping, a deceitful man secretly took it back and flung it into the sea. He insisted, 'for the guilty gratification of his lustful whims', that because she had lost it the woman should become his slave. Brigit was deliberating over how to help her when a man delivered a fish he had caught and the brooch was found within it. The inadvertence of the miracle conveyed rather than compromised Brigit's sanctity: she had saved the woman from sexual slavery and the episode culminated in the man's confession and reorientation towards a life committed to God.²⁴ Like these miracles, the 'abortion miracle' motif touched on religious life:

With a strength of faith most powerful and ineffable, she faithfully blessed a woman who, after a vow of integrity, had fallen into youthful concupiscence, whose womb was now swelling with pregnancy: and, after the conception disappeared, without childbirth or pain she restored her healthy to penitence.²⁵

The same motif also appeared in the *Vita Prima*:

On another occasion, through the most powerful strength of God, Saint Brigit blessed the swelling womb of a woman: when the conception disappeared, without childbirth or pain she restored her healthy to penitence. She was healed and gave thanks to God.²⁶

These two *vitae* were very different, first, in terms of politico-religious subtext. Whereas Cogitosus was staking a claim for Kildare's pre-eminence as a pilgrimage site, the *Vita Prima* was written in the absence of Brigit's relics and located her activity more widely across the religious landscape of Ireland, possibly in the context of a changing political situation and increased tension with Patrician Armagh to the north.²⁷

Second, the Brigits of these *vitae* differed in detail and emphasis. Like so many saints, Cogitosus's Brigit, 'whom God foreknew and predestined

according to his own image', was marked for sanctity from her conception and through her precocious childhood.²⁸ When her parents desired to marry her off 'according to the custom of the world', Brigit approached the bishop Mac Caille, 'inspired from above and wanting to devote herself as a chaste virgin to God'. Struck by her 'love of chastity', he placed the white veil over her head. The wood of the altar which she touched at her consecration, Cogitosus noted, was still visited by pilgrims seeking relief from afflictions.²⁹ Though the number of 'folkloric' miracles wrought was unusual by continental standards, she was nonetheless, in Lisa Bitel's words, a 'holy woman of such stereotypical virtues that her vita might have been written in Gaul or Rome...virtuous, tireless and humble to the point of seeming passivity'.³⁰

The Brigit of the *Vita Prima* was also devoted to chastity. When her father and brothers began pressurising her into marrying, she prayed for a deformity to stave off suitors, whereupon one of her eyes burst.³¹ But, more unusually, the Brigit of the *Vita Prima* was peripatetic and evocative of Irish heroic traditions, and the depiction of her commitment to chastity was coloured with these distinctive traits. Her birth story marked her sanctity from the womb when a druid prophesied her future eminence upon encountering her pregnant mother, the slave-girl Broicsech, and father, Broicsech's master Dubthach.³² She attracted fellow virgins to the religious life on her wanderings north to territories in the orbit of Patrick and his disciples.³³ On one such visit, Brigit resolved a paternity dispute. A council of bishops was adjudicating the matter of a professed virgin who alleged that she had given birth to the child of a bishop from among Patrick's followers. Patrick entrusted an initially reluctant Brigit with ascertaining the truth. Disbelieving the woman's account, Brigit marked a cross on the woman's mouth, causing her head and tongue to swell up, and blessed the infant's tongue before asking him who his father was. The infant disclosed the accused bishop's innocence and revealed that his father was a 'certain fellow who is sitting furthest away at the very end of the council-hall'; the woman repented.³⁴ Like Cogitosus's Brigit, however, she was not a virile ascetic who transcended her gender but a chaste woman who, as a holy man visionary recognised in one encounter, was a 'type of Mary', a physical virgin and symbolic mother.³⁵

The *vitae* of Áed and Cainnech

The motif is one of several shared between the Brigidine *vitae* and the *vitae* of the sixth-century male saints Áed and Cainnech, which were composed, following Sharpe's arguments, around the turn of the ninth century. The *vita Aidi* presented a peripatetic national saint not associated with any particular ecclesiastical centre or political dynasty.³⁶ Several miracles showcased Áed's friendships with female religious communities which received him with hospitality. In a miracle directly preceding the motif, three female religious

were ambushed and decapitated by robbers, who stole off with their heads. Seeing this in a vision, Áed arrived at the women's mourning community and pursued the robbers, whose flight was stalled by divine intervention. Reproached by the saint, the robbers underwent penance. Returning with the women's heads, Áed revived them.³⁷ In other stories he miraculously replenished a meal served by an impoverished female community and contended with a king reluctant to free his slave-girl to take the veil.³⁸ In the context of the *vita*, the motif reemphasised Áed's affiliations with female religious life:

On another day, making a journey, Áed came to a place of other holy virgins called Druimard and was received with great joy in hospitality. But gazing upon the virgin who was serving him, holy Áed saw that her womb was swelling and carrying a child. Immediately he stood up without [eating] food to take flight from that place. Then she confessed before all that she had secretly sinned and did penance. And holy Áed blessed her womb, and immediately the infant in her womb disappeared as if it did not exist.³⁹

Finally, the motif appears in a slightly different guise in the *vita Cainnechi*:

A certain virgin living in a place close to him secretly fornicated, and her womb swelled up with a child. She asked holy Cainnech to bless her womb as if it were swelling from some illness. When he had blessed her, immediately the infant in her womb disappeared without showing.⁴⁰

Where the authors of the *vitae* obtained the motif from is not entirely certain. The *vita Aidi* contains elements derived from both Brigidine *vitae*: the foretelling of his sanctity at birth bears comparisons to Brigit's birth story in the *Vita Prima*, while the story of the recovered brooch in Cogitosus finds a parallel when Áed came to the aid of a religious woman entrusted with a king's gold and silver ornament.⁴¹ It seems likely that the motif was adapted from a Brigidine source. The author of Cainnech's *vita*, however, may have adapted the motif from the *vita Aidi*. Máire Herbert has argued that it drew on the *vita Aidi* as a source on the basis of paralleled motifs and an episode in which Cainnech comes to the aid of Áed in rescuing a sister abducted by a king.⁴² It is plausible, then, that the author of the *vita Aidi* adapted the motif conscious of a gender switch from female to male saint, while the *vita Cainnechi* adapted the motif as the miracle of a male saint.

The *vita* of Ciarán of Saigir

The motif of male saints performing such a miracle can be compared to a lengthier episode in the *vita* of Ciarán of Saigir, which, like its subject, cannot be dated securely.⁴³ Ciarán's mother had established a female religious community next to his monastery at which a group of women 'imitated the

life of the saints', among them a 'noble and very beautiful girl' called Bruinech, whom a local king, Dimma, abducted. 'Loathing the immensity of so great a crime', Ciarán set off on a rescue mission. Dimma laid down a challenge: he would return Ciarán's 'disciple' if the saint could awaken him the next morning through the cooing of a cuckoo (unlikely in the middle of winter). Nonetheless, a cuckoo awoke a startled Dimma at dawn and, having broken his resolve, Ciarán recovered Bruinech. But not without a disturbing revelation:

After the man of God returned to the monastery with the girl, she confessed that she had conceived in her womb. Then the man of God, stirred by a zeal for justice, not wanting the serpent's seed to come alive, by making the sign of the cross on her belly made it empty.⁴⁴

The story did not quite end there. Dimma returned to the monastery to abduct Bruinech once again and she dropped dead at the sight of him. Through his prayers, Ciarán revived her and the feud with Dimma ended when Ciarán miraculously saved his son from a fire. Dimma finally repented and consecrated both of his sons to Ciarán.

Ciarán's miracle puts the gender permutations of the motif in the *vitae* of Áed and Cainnech into sharper relief. In Ciarán's miracle, Bruinech's body became, in Callan's words, the 'battlefield for a war waged between religious and secular male authority...[and] little more than the site of one man's effacement of another's virility'.⁴⁵ The miracles of Áed and Cainnech were not coloured with the same concern to underline religious male authority. Ideas condensed in three words recur across them and the Brigidine versions: the swelling (*tumescere*) by which the nun's pregnancy was beginning to show and the disappearance or evanescence (*evanescere*) brought about by the saint's blessing (*benedicere*). But certain differences are visible too. Unlike Brigit, the male saints are distanced from reproductive matters. In Áed's case, his enigmatic response upon realising that the nun was pregnant, dramatically leaving the table, hints perhaps at a sense of pollution and his blessing only came after the nun's confession to her community. In Cainnech's case, the penitential theme is almost absent. Like the story of Brigit and the brooch, this was something of an inadvertent miracle and there is even a whisper of deception: it is not altogether clear that Cainnech knew what he was doing.⁴⁶ These differences condense how the social experience of reproduction interacted with both gender and religious status, and typify attempts by the male clerical hierarchy to wrest greater ideological control over reproduction.⁴⁷ But, understanding the significance of the motif, what made it miraculous, gravitates around gender in a different sense.

Complications: making the text disappear

This understanding must first navigate the potentially distorting effect of the

motif's fate in the hands of later medieval redactors and early modern editors. It evidently scandalised nineteenth-century Catholics. In Migne's edition of Cogitosus's *vita* in the *Patrologia Latina*, one can read of the preceding miracle, the transformation of water into ale for lepers, an allusion to Christ's miracle at Cana, and the subsequent one, the turning of stone into salt at a poor man's request. But the motif is nowhere to be seen: Brigit's miraculous undoing of the nun's sexual lapse was sufficiently unsettling for it to have disappeared leaving only an elliptical trace.⁴⁸ Similarly, John O'Hanlon's influential ten-volume *Lives of the Irish Saints* published in 1875 synthesised the multiple *vitae* of saints into single narratives. As he made explicit in his preface, his syntheses excluded 'no statement of importance, judged consistent with sound morals and doctrine, or Christian edification'. Less explicitly, elements not consonant with this aim were excised, including the motif.⁴⁹

The story of the motif in the hands of later medieval compilers is more complicated, though here too one can detect editorial adjustments. In the Dublin redaction of the *vita Aidi*, the story became about the spiritual, but not physical, consequences of sexual sin: the saint 'realised that one of them had fallen into sin. Then aware that the holy bishop had learned of her sin, she confessed her guilt in front of all, and did penance'.⁵⁰ The story was completely excised from the *vita Cainnechi* as represented in Plummer.⁵¹ Curiously, in the case of Ciarán, the redaction in Plummer's edition brought the moment when Bruinech was disburdened of her pregnancy closer to the more candid versions of Áed's and Cainnech's miracles: 'The man of God, seeing that [Bruinech's] womb was swelling with a child, blessed her womb with the sign of the holy cross, and her stomach immediately shrank, and the child in her womb disappeared'.⁵²

Similarly, in a later life of Brigit, based on the *Vita Prima* and edited by Sharpe, the story of the pregnant nun was omitted by an editor sensitive to 'passages of a remotely scandalous nature'. Perhaps the scenario of a pregnant nun caused as much offence as the hint of abortion: the story of Brigit's involvement in the paternity dispute referred simply to a woman (*mulier*) rather than a female religious (*virgo*). Additionally, some manuscript copies of Cogitosus's *vita* also omitted the story.⁵³

If these editorial adjustments and the impulses which appear to underlie them make it tempting to read modern dynamics into the motif – they, like us, seem to detect a tolerant attitude to sexual sin and abortion – it ought to be remembered that the motif was retained in at least some manuscript copies of the Brigidine *vitae*, the Salamanca *vitae* and the Bollandists' early modern edition. Not all subsequent readers of the miracle necessarily saw in the motif what, we presume, certain anxious editors did. The adjustments suggest that the motif needs to be historicised and understood in early medieval terms.

The miraculous in the motif: gender and chastity

Sean Connolly has implied that the authors of the motif, writing with ‘delightful naïveté’, did not quite realise what they were representing.⁵⁴ But, in fact, the motif was included in *vitae* with diverse political and ecclesiastical subtexts, suggesting that hagiographers saw something edifying in it which transcended these other impulses. As Dorothy Bray has noted, the ‘possibility that [early Irish] miracle stories might have a moral or spiritual lesson to offer is frequently overlooked or dismissed’.⁵⁵ Hagiographers crafted their works for an ‘ecclesiastical public’ frequently, but not exclusively, monastic and receptive to their layered meanings.⁵⁶ Saints’ lives were, in Lisa Bitel’s words, ‘liturgical drama[s]’, often read out with accompanying ritual on feast days, which invited audiences to ‘learn from the example of a life led piously, meditate on the life journey of the saint, catch certain thematic links, conceive of a deeper meaning to the order in which events occurred...and receive other encoded messages’.⁵⁷

The ‘moral or spiritual lesson’ lying at the heart of the motif concerned the reconciliation and healing of individuals and, by implication, their communities, following the disruption of sexual sin. In a monastic context, pregnancy through fornication was both a spiritual and physical affliction from which the lapsed virgin emerged ‘healthy’, in part, through the medicine of penance. To an audience which encountered other miracles concerning chastity within the *vitae*, the motif enacted expiation and reintegration within communities.⁵⁸ Maeve Callan has rightly drawn attention to the possibility for restored virginity in prescriptive ecclesiastical texts. Here, the importance of Ireland in the broader history of penance is significant.⁵⁹ The mid-to-late sixth-century *Penitential of Finnian*, one of the oldest surviving penitentials or handbooks for confession, held out the possibility for reconciliation after sexual lapses by vowed virgins and clerics alike. After a canon on abortion or infanticide, which gave a half-year penance to any ‘woman who has destroyed someone’s child by her *maleficium*’ (a term which connects magic and poisoning), the author immediately turned to any professed virgin whose ‘sin becomes manifest’. After six years of penance, she would be ‘joined to the altar, and then we can say that she can restore her crown and put on the white robe and be declared a virgin’. Likewise, a cleric who had fathered a child would regain his office in the seventh year. Produced in a monastic setting, this penitential viewed sexual sin through the lens of communal visibility. It treated nuns and clerics whose sexual sin had become publicly disclosed through the birth of a child more stringently than those whose sin remained hidden.⁶⁰

The miracle motif perhaps played on the intelligibility of recourse by the religious to conceal sexual sin, though it should also be stressed that the penitential dimension publicised the sin. Moreover, its audiences might well have been familiar with stricter ecclesiastical rulings against abortion. The

Collectio canonum Hibernensis, an important Irish collection of canon law composed in the late seventh or early eighth century and which later proliferated on the continent, addressed abortion in a section on religious, rather than lay, women. It reiterated patristic and conciliar rulings against abortion which left the possibility of remedial penance open but which broached abortion in terms less mitigated by consideration of communal visibility. For instance, a quotation from Jerome's famous letter on asceticism to Eustochium rebuked professed virgins who conceived in sin, drank potions to have abortion and often died in the process: such women would be triply damned as 'suicides, adulterers against Christ and parricides of their unborn children'.⁶¹ The possibility of such familiarity is given further, albeit later, support when we bear in mind that the Brigidine *vitae* circulated and, indeed, survived on the continent. In the ninth century, a Carolingian reader who consulted the oldest surviving manuscript containing the whole of Cogitosus's *vita* would also have been able to read Halitgar of Cambrai's penitential, which incorporated condemnations of abortion from earlier penitentials and canon law with an original canon singling out abortionists, namely the 'apothecary, male or female, [that is] killers of children'.⁶²

Hagiographic authors may have been more disciplined by awareness of what abortion was understood to entail, physically and morally, than historians have recognised. Ciarán's miracle, for example, wrought because the saint did not want the 'serpent's seed to come alive', was rhetorically crafted in manipulation, rather than disregard, of emerging ecclesiastical strictures on abortion which calibrated penances according to varyingly defined stages of fetal development.⁶³ Likewise, the authors of the motif very deliberately described something which was not, in fact, quite an abortion. This is not to deny that they were conveying the intelligibility of recourse to abortion by those with a stake in keeping sexual sin secret. But it is to recognise that, on early medieval understandings, abortion did not avoid parturition but rendered parturition premature in the bloody flux of miscarriage. One penitential composed on the continent in c.800, but drawing heavily on Irish material, described abortion in an earlier stage of pregnancy as 'destruction of the liquid matter of the infant'.⁶⁴ A more graphic visualisation comes from seventh-century Spain. In replying to a priest troubled by the problem of whether Christ's blood splattered at his scourging had been restored to him at his resurrection, Braulio of Saragossa turned to the unpleasant superfluities of menstrual blood, semen and miscarriage to defuse these concerns. 'Why should it not be believed', he asked, 'that human blood is drawn off and perishes when the humour of generation and blood, as well as the miscarriage (*aborsus*), are not restored in the resurrection to either parent, if indeed one can speak of a parent, whose disgusting fluid or inanimate foetus is poured forth?'⁶⁵ By speaking of uterine evanescence, the previously swelling womb emptied of a child which vanished as if it had never been, hagiographers were not elaborating a euphemism for abortion, but were carefully describing the

ends of abortion without quite describing the means. What was truly miraculous about the motif was that the pregnant nun has her fornication erased, enters into reconciliation and avoids the bloody, premature parturition of abortion.

The impetus behind this, more than ‘pagan’ custom fossilised in a Christian text or a broader permissive attitude encoded in the miracle, lay in the symbolism of chastity. While no *regulae* or rules for early Irish nuns have survived, the symbolic connotations of what chastity allowed women to avoid within the delineation of female religious identity can hardly be overstated. Many monastic theorists used the uglier toils of marriage, sexuality and childbearing to illuminate the beauty of consecrated virginity. In the seventh century, Leander of Seville counted the ‘weight of the pregnant womb’ and mortality in childbirth in which the very ‘function and fruit of marriage perish’ among the ‘primary dangers’ of marriage in his *regula* for nuns addressed to his sister Florentina.⁶⁶ Similarly, in a poem on virginity, Venantius Fortunatus wrote that, for virgins, the ‘stiffening womb does not press down with a fetus shut within’ in a kind of prenatal depression.⁶⁷ A comparable symbolic dimension is implicit in other episodes within the *vitae* and in the different versions of the motif. It is also explicitly inscribed upon the Brigidine versions in which the nun's pregnancy disappeared ‘without childbirth or pain’. This may have been a subtle hint at a kind of female collaboration absent in the miracles wrought by Áed and Cainnech; significantly, as Callan notes, it is Brigit who spares the nun from the pain of childbirth and the *VP*'s version, in which the nun ‘gave thanks to God’, yields the only evocation of the nun's own perspective.⁶⁸ But the allusion to ‘childbirth or pain’ also bears a crucial symbolic weight, referring to the curse in Genesis 3: 16 by which God committed Eve and her female descendants to the pain of childbirth as a symbol of original sin.⁶⁹ It was not simply that the miracle averted the painful birth of an unwanted child – it averted the unwanted symbolism of having that child.

Conclusion

If religious life did not allow early medieval women to transcend conventional gender roles altogether, chastity and the avoidance of marriage, sexuality and childbearing certainly represented a crucial dimension of how religious life transformed gender. Sexual sin, however, threatened a reversion back from this transformation: the nun who had fallen into fornication risked lapsing into the ways of the world she had left behind. The miracle wrought by Brigit, Áed and Cainnech, however, allowed the sinning nun to remain distinct from her unprofessed counterpart even in the aftermath of her sin. These saints remedied such sin for individuals and their communities by allowing the nun to avoid the physical and symbolic degradation of both childbirth and abortion. Paradoxically, then, in early medieval religion, chastity could

transform gender – sometimes even when it was breached.

Notes

I am grateful to the participants of the colloquium for their responses and discussion; to the anonymous reviewer for comments; and to Katherine Cross for reading the chapter.

- 1 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* XI.ii.17–19, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford Classical Texts, 1911), unpaginated.
- 2 Re eunuchs, see Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); also Shaun Tougher, ‘Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch, 300–900’, in Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 70–82. For dowagers, see Linda E. Mitchell, *Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage, and Politics in England, 1225–1350* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- 3 See Dyan Elliott, ‘The Three Ages of Joan Scott’, *American Historical Review* 113 (2008), pp. 1390–1403.
- 4 Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 120–229, quotations on pp. 144, 148. For comparable later medieval arguments, see R. N. Swanson, ‘Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation’, in Dawn M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 160–77; Jacqueline Murray, ‘One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?’, in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (eds), *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 34–51.
- 5 Ruth Mazo Karras, ‘Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt: Masculinity in Medieval Europe’, in Bitel and Lifshitz (eds) *Gender and Christianity*, pp. 52–67, here p. 53.
- 6 Emma Pettit, ‘Holiness and Masculinity in Aldhelm's *Opus Geminatum de Virginitate*’, in Patricia H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (eds), *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 8–23, quotation on p. 18.
- 7 Simon Coates, ‘Regendering Radegund? Fortunatus, Baudonivia and the Problem of Female Sanctity in Merovingian Gaul’, in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Gender and Religion*, *Studies in Church History* 34 (Woodbridge: Boydell

- Press, 1998), pp. 37–50. See also Giselle de Nie, “‘Consciousness Fecund Through God’: From Male Fighter to Spiritual Bridegroom in Late Antique Female Sanctity”, in Anneke Mulder-Bakker (ed.), *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 101–61.
- 8 Jo Ann McNamara, ‘Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours’, in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (eds), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 209.
- 9 Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis*, 14.2–9, ed. E. Dekkers, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL) 2 (1954), pp. 1224–5.
- 10 David Herlihy, ‘Households in the Early Middle Ages: Symmetry and Sainthood’, in Robert McC. Netting, Richard R. Wilk and Eric J. Arnould (eds), *Households: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 389–90.
- 11 Lisa Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 77.
- 12 Maeve B. Callan, ‘Of Vanishing Fetuses and Maidens Made-Again: Abortion, Restored Virginity, and Similar Scenarios in Medieval Irish Hagiography and Penitentials’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21 (2012), pp. 282–96.
- 13 Kim McCone, ‘An Introduction to Early Irish Saints’ Lives’, *Maynooth Review* 11 (1984), pp. 26–59; Clare Stancliffe, ‘The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints’ Lives’, in J. Fontaine and J. N. Hillgarth (eds), *The Seventh Century: Change and Continuity* (London: Warburg Institute, 1992), pp. 87–111.
- 14 *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), hereafter Plummer; *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi*, ed. W. W. Heist (Brussels: Société de Bollandistes, 1965), hereafter Heist.
- 15 Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints’ Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
- 16 On Brigit’s dates, see Lisa Bitel, ‘Body of a Saint, Story of a Goddess: Origins of the Brigidine Tradition’, *Textual Practice* 16 (2002), pp. 209–28, here p. 210.
- 17 Catherine McKenna, ‘Apotheosis and Evanescence: The Fortunes of Saint Brigit in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, in Joseph F. Nagy (ed.), *The Individual in Celtic Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 74–108.

- 18 Mary Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).
- 19 Christina Harrington, *Women in the Celtic Church: Ireland, 450–1150* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 6–16, quotation on p. 11, including pp. 7–8 on Condren's methodology.
- 20 Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990); Joseph F. Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Motifs of Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), pp. 68–80, counters 'exaggerated claims...made about the degree of power and freedom enjoyed by women in early Irish society' (p. 68).
- 21 See Giles Constable, 'Aelred of Rievaulx and the Nun of Watton: An Episode in the Early History of the Gilbertine Order', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*, Studies in Church History, subsidia 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 205–26, for a comparable but more elaborate twelfth-century episode.
- 22 The debate is ongoing: two important contributions with contrasting arguments are Richard Sharpe, 'Vita S. Brigidae: The Oldest Texts' and Kim McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century: A Saint with Three Lives?' *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp. 81–106, 107–45 respectively. Nathalie Stalmans, *Saints d'Irlande: Analyse critique des sources hagiographiques (VII^e–X^e siècles)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003), pp. 59–67, 269–87, provides a more recent overview.
- 23 Cog.12, tr. Sean Connolly and J.-M. Picard, 'Cogitosus's *Life of St Brigit*: Content and Value', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), p. 16. In what follows, I quote from this translation and Connolly's translation of the *VP* (see note 26 below) except where the Latin, taken from the *Acta Sanctorum* (AS), is of interest.
- 24 Cog.25, tr. Connolly and Picard, pp. 21–2. For secular parallels, see Ludwig Bieler, 'Hagiography and Romance in Medieval Ireland', *Medievalia et Humanistica* new series 6 (1975), p. 16.
- 25 'Potentissima enim et ineffabili fidei fortitudine, quamdam feminam, post votum integritatis, fragilitate humana in juvenili voluptatis desiderio lapsam, et habentem jam praegnantem ac tumescentem uterum, fideliter benedixit: et evanescente in vulva conceptu, sine partu et sine dolore eam sanam ad penitentiam restituit', II.13, AS Feb I. col.136F; translation adapted from Cog. 9, tr. Connolly and Picard, p. 16.
- 26 'Alio autem tempore S. Brigida, per potentissimam Dei virtutem, cujusdam

- mulieris tumescentem vulvam benedixit: et evanescente conceptu, sine partu et dolore eam sanam ad poenitentiam restituit. Illa vero sanata est, et Deo gratias egit', 16.100, AS Feb I. col.133C. In the AS's Latin, the woman is not explicitly a nun. Connolly's translation from an unpublished critical edition based on 26 full manuscripts, however, refers to a 'woman who had fallen after a vow of integrity': VP 103, tr. Sean Connolly, 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae: Background and Historical Value', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 119 (1989), p. 45.
- 27 Bitel, 'Body of a Saint'. See also Stalmans, *Saints d'Irlande*, pp. 100–08.
- 28 Cog.1.1, tr. Connolly and Picard, p. 13. The scriptural allusion is to Jeremiah 1: 5.
- 29 Cog.2, tr. Connolly and Picard, p. 14.
- 30 Bitel, 'Body of a Saint', p. 214.
- 31 VP 19, tr. Connolly, p. 18. On female self-mutilation or psychosomatic illness to avoid marriage in early medieval hagiography, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, c.a. 500–1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 144–55.
- 32 VP 2, tr. Connolly, p. 14; Bitel, 'Body of a Saint', pp. 216–22.
- 33 VP 20, tr. Connolly, p. 18.
- 34 VP 39, tr. Connolly, p. 23.
- 35 VP 17, tr. Connolly, p. 17. On Brigit's Marian associations, see Diane Peters Auslander, 'Gendering the "Vita Prima": An Examination of St. Brigid's Role as "Mary of the Gael"', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 20/21 (2000/1), pp. 187–202.
- 36 Stalmans, *Saints d'Irlande*, pp. 206–9, 235–6.
- 37 *Vita Aidi* 16, Heist, pp. 172–3. See also Lisa Bitel, 'Saints and Angry Neighbours: The Politics of Cursing in Irish Hagiography', in Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (eds), *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 123–50, here p. 131.
- 38 *Vita Aidi* 20, 37, Heist, pp. 173–4, 178.
- 39 'Quadam autem die, Aidus, iter agens, venit ad aliarum sanctarum virginum locum, qui dicitur Druimm Ard, et cum magno gaudio in hospiciu[m] receptus est. Intuens autem sanctus Aidus virginem que sibi ministrabat, vidit quod uterus illius, partum gestans, intumescebat. Et cito surrexit ille sine cibo, ut ab isto loco fugeret. Tunc illa coram omnibus

- confessa est quod occulte peccasset et penitentiam egit. Sanctus autem Aidus benedixit uterum eius, et statim infans in utero eius evanuit quasi non esset', *Vita Aidi* 15, Heist, p. 172.
- 40 'Quedam virgo in vicino sibi loco habitans occulte fornicavit, et uterus eius partu intumuit. Que a sancto Kannecho postulavit ut uterum suum, quasi aliquo dolore tumescentem, benediceret. Cumque ille benedixisset eam, statim infans in utero eius non apparens evanuit', *Vita Cainnechi* 56, Heist, p. 197.
- 41 *Vita Aidi* 1, 33, Heist, pp. 167–8, 177.
- 42 *Vita Cainnechi* 32, Heist, p. 190; Máire Herbert, 'The *Vita Columbae* and Irish Hagiography: A Study of the *Vita Cainnechi*', in John Carey, Máire Herbert and Pádraig Ó Riain (eds), *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 31–40.
- 43 The Salamanca codex may not represent an older text: Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 293–6.
- 44 'Revertente vero vir Dei cum puella ad monasterium, confessa est puella se conceptum habere in utero. Tunc vir Dei, zelo iustitiae ductus, viperium semen animari nolens, impresso ventri eius signo crucis, fecit illud exinaniri', *Vita s. Ciarani* 5, Heist, p. 348.
- 45 Callan, 'Vanishing Fetuses', p. 290.
- 46 A miracle attributed to Radegund, in which she healed a nun swollen (*tumefacta*) with dropsy by immersing her in chrism so that the 'illness left no trace in the womb (*utero*)' and 'no damage to the stomach (*ventris*)', suggests that the prevarication was not wholly implausible: Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis* 80–1, MGH Auct. ant. 4.2, p. 93.
- 47 Bitel, *Land of Women*, pp. 80–83, Callan, 'Vanishing Fetuses', p. 295.
- 48 PL 72, col.780c. See also Danuta Shanzer, 'Voices and Bodies: The Afterlife of the Unborn', *Numen* 56 (2009), p. 352 n.103.
- 49 Quoted in McKenna, 'Apotheosis and Evanescence', pp. 91–2.
- 50 'vir Dei cognovit unam earum tunc cecidisse in peccatum. Tunc illa sciens quod noverat peccatum eius sanctus episcopus, confessa est culpam suam coram omnibus, et egit penitentiam', *Vita Aedi*, Plummer, I, p. 38. See also Dorothy Africa, review of Dorothy Ann Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints*, *Speculum* 71 (1996) p. 131.
- 51 See the note in Heist, p. 197.
- 52 'Videns autem vir Dei quod uterus illius femine partu intumescebat, signo

- sancte crucis benedixit vulvam illius, et venter eius exinde decrevit, et partus in utero evanuit', *Vita Ciarani de Saigir* 9, Plummer, I, p. 221. See also David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 32; Bitel, *Land of Women*, p. 77; Callan, 'Vanishing Fetuses', p. 290 n. 30.
- 53 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 153 n. 73, 200 n. 187, quotation at p. 213. The version in the *AS* without explicit allusion to religious profession (see n. 28) may reflect a similar sensitivity.
- 54 Connolly, 'Cogitosus's *Life of St Brigit*', p. 7. This is quoted from Connolly's introduction to the translation by Connolly and Picard.
- 55 Dorothy Ann Bray, 'Miracles and Wonders in the Composition of the Lives of the Early Irish Saints', in Jane Cartwright (ed.), *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 136.
- 56 Herbert, '*Vita Columbae*', p. 39.
- 57 Bitel, 'Body of a Saint', p. 213.
- 58 See Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church*, pp. 88, 150–54. On penance as medicinal, see John T. McNeill, 'Medicine for Sin as Prescribed in the Penitentials', *Church History* 1 (1932), pp. 14–26.
- 59 Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), pp. 19–59.
- 60 P. Vinniani cc. 20–21, ed. and tr. Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), pp. 78–81 (my translation). For a more detailed reading, see Zubin Mistry, "'Alienated from the Womb": Abortion in the Early Medieval West, c.500–900' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2011), pp. 104–10.
- 61 *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* 45.3–5, ed. F. W. H. Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung* (Giessen: J. Ricker'sche Buchhandlung, 1874), p. 210; Jerome, *Ep.* 22.13, PL 22, cols. 401–2.
- 62 *P. pseudo-Romanum* 2.16, 5.1–2, 11.22, ed. F. W. H. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche* (Halle: C. Graeger, 1851), pp. 366–7, 369, 375. This manuscript (Paris, BN, MS lat. 2999) was written in the first third of the ninth century in northeastern France. The manuscript has been mutilated and most of the *vita* is lost. An index survives, however, including the heading, 'About a pregnant [woman] blessed without pain'; see Mario Esposito, 'On the Earliest Latin Life of St. Brigid of Kildare', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 30 (1912–13),

- pp. 313–4, with Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, p. 18 on dating and provenance.
- 63 See Mistry, 'Alienated from the Womb', pp. 125–6 on Irish conciliar material and the *Old Irish Penitential*.
- 64 *P. Bigotianum*, IV.2.2, Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*, p. 228.
- 65 *Ep.* 42, PL 80, cols. 687d–688d.
- 66 *Regula* 1, PL 72, col. 879c.
- 67 *Carmina* 8.3, MGH Auct. ant. 4.1, p. 189.
- 68 Callan, 'Vanishing Fetuses', pp. 291–2. I am also grateful to Michelle Sauer for underlining this aspect during discussion at the colloquium.
- 69 A rare scriptural allusion, as Stalmans, *Saints d'Irlande*, pp. 171–2 notes.

‘Give Me Chastity’: Masculinity and Attitudes to Chastity and Celibacy in the Middle Ages

Pat Cullum

Augustine of Hippo's plea to ‘give me chastity and continence, but not yet’ has resonated with modern readers and writers as the ‘natural’ reaction of men (and to a lesser extent, women) to the demands of Christianity for the restriction or even avoidance of sexual activity by believers.¹ Augustine's ambivalent response to the competing expectations and attractions of the Roman and Christian cultures in which he lived was an expression of his own belief in the flawed nature of the human soul, its desire to do the right thing but its often tragic inability to sustain that in the face of the temptations of the flesh, but it can also be understood as the product of disparate conceptions of appropriate masculinity. Augustine lived in a world which both applauded the virile expression of sexuality before and during marriage, and held up an ideal of masculine self-restraint and submission of the body's various appetites to the will. Nor was this straightforwardly a distinction between Christian and Roman values. If Christians valued virginity and chastity, it was also true that most Christians married, and Stoic values of self-restraint were an important influence on the development of Christian attitudes to sexual behaviour.²

While the late Antique world acknowledged the competing attractions of chastity and sexuality for men, more recent writing has paid much less attention to the attractions and significance of the non-sexual life for men in the Middle Ages. There have been extensive studies of the attractions of virginity, chaste or spiritual marriage and vowed widowhood for women, including considerations of the social, spiritual and physical benefits to be gained from its adoption, which have addressed a range of issues, largely focusing on the use of gendered behaviour and expectation.³ But there has been very little written on laymen, and almost exclusively in contexts where the failure to produce an heir had political consequences.⁴ That attitude may be beginning to change, and this chapter explores some of the evidence for an interest in chastity and celibacy on the part of laymen in late medieval England.⁵

The relative absence of such consideration for medieval men is partly a product of the relatively undeveloped state of the field of late medieval masculinity, which has largely focused on high status men, but is partly also a

product of the development of a late twentieth/early twenty-first century blind spot about male sexuality. We have moved from a position of heteronormativity which developed (according to different scholars) sometime between the Reformation and the nineteenth century, and which produced a model of hegemonic masculinity predicated upon heterosexual marriage, with deviant sexualities of heterosexual behaviours outside marriage and homosexual behaviours in any context, to a late twentieth/early twenty-first century model of compulsory sexuality for men. That is, adult men are predominantly expected to be sexually active, either heterosexually within or outside marriage or within a homosexual relationship. While homosexuality remains an area of contestation in many areas of western culture, the widespread legislation for recognising homosexual unions on similar or identical grounds to marriage in recent years suggests it can no longer be seen as other than normal – if not normative, at least within the dominant culture.⁶ What has largely disappeared from the cultural view, however, is the non-sexual man. Even where men live outside a relationship or series of relationships, the expectation is that the ready availability of prostitution and pornography means that sexual activity of some kind is functional and normative. Where the non-sexual man appears, it is almost always as a problematic figure. The only significant group of men in modern western culture who explicitly do not marry are Catholic clergy, and the growing public awareness of a series of scandals, occasionally about clerical relations with women, but more widely to do with the sexual abuse of children, has led to a perception that celibacy is not only deeply problematic, leading to deviant forms of sexual behaviour, but that in practice it does not exist. The priestly and monastic vows of chastity are perceived to be merely an outward show, and all men are ‘naturally’, if sometimes deviantly, sexual. The non-sexual man has become a fiction; he is not even sufficiently substantial to become a cultural other. And yet the compulsorily sexual man is not ‘natural’, he is the gendered product of a specific historical context, just as were the very different gender constructions of the late Middle Ages which allowed and encouraged some men to adopt the celibate life as an ideal.

This chapter will consider the attractions for men of the celibate life outside the monastery in the pre-Reformation past, and particularly for men who were married, had been married or were at risk of being married.⁷ While there has been some acknowledgement of the attractions of virginity or vowed chastity for women, there has been very little attention paid to the attractions of asexuality for men. Even where there have been discussions of ‘spiritual’ or ‘chaste marriage’, this has generally focused on the female side of the partnership, whatever the focus of the original documentation.⁸ However, there has been no concerted attempt to explore the extent to which the chaste life appealed to the layman, either in the lay state or as a post-marital priest.

Accounts of the development of a celibate priesthood have generally couched

this in terms of the top-down imposition of a monastic model of piety on a reluctant secular clergy, who proceeded to observe the letter but not the spirit of the legislation, by not marrying, but keeping a mistress or concubine, or by visiting prostitutes.⁹ In recent years, there have been re-evaluations of the Reformation documents which ostensibly demonstrated wholesale failure on the part of the monastic population to adhere to vows of continence and thus the failure of monasticism as an institution. There is now fairly widespread acceptance that breach of vows among monks was relatively rare and that among the late medieval monastic community there was generally an adherence to the legislation. Similarly, reviews of the secular clergy now tend to recognise that earlier writings on their sexual behaviour were overly pessimistic, without necessarily giving them quite the bill of health of monks and regular clergy.¹⁰ All of which suggests that there was a broad acceptance of, even if not universal adherence to, the demands of celibacy. Indeed, it has been suggested that there was an increasing emphasis on celibacy as an aspect of the sacerdotal role in the years before the Reformation, and hence the importance of accusations of the failure to observe it in critiques of both regular and secular clergy at the Reformation, and thus the willingness to accept arguments that it revealed fundamental flaws in the conventional understanding of the clerical life.¹¹ Recent studies have moved on from moral judgements about the 'success' or 'failure' of the clerical life as evidenced by willingness to conform to celibacy, to a consideration of the reasons for non-conformity, and particularly of the extent to which concubinage became a substitute for marriage.¹² While the greater emphasis on the problematising of celibacy as a given is to be welcomed, the approach also risks normalising sexual behaviour on the part of the clergy.

Writers on the patristic and early medieval period have given some attention to the place of the celibate life as lived not only by monks but also by bishops, holy widows, virgins and spouses in spiritual, chaste or continent marriages, that is where a couple lived together and either from the beginning of the marriage, or at a later date, forswore sexual relations.¹³ Included among these discussions has been the development of the figure of the bishop from married man to one who was not only unmarried at the point of elevation but who could have had only a very limited previous experience of marriage. An interesting development of this was the idea of the bishop as married to his diocese rather than to an earthly spouse.¹⁴ What these and numbers of other studies demonstrate is that the late Antique world had a rich diversity of engagements with the idea of and practice of celibacy, which by the high medieval period had largely, but not entirely, narrowed to a dichotomy between the celibacy of the professional religious and the sexual activity of the laity, a distinction largely embarked upon in adolescence and expected to be life long, a reorganisation which it has been argued also had profound effects on gender structures.¹⁵ That laypeople, both men and women, sought to blur those boundaries, or at least to move from one state to the other in

adulthood, is a testimony to the continuing appeal of the celibate life.

In the twelfth century, it is evident that the expansion of numbers of monastic houses and the development of new orders led to significant numbers of older married or widowed men joining the monastic life. Cluny attracted so many married (and widowed) men that it had to establish a nunnery at Marcigny to support the wives of men who had joined the order.¹⁶ It was not only the new orders which attracted older men: Canterbury Cathedral counted among its monks both the father of an important civic official and a man whose wife was still living, and whom he provided with a corrody from the cathedral.¹⁷ While the monastic life was about more than a commitment to celibacy, the willingness of significant numbers of men to give up marital life suggests that at the very least celibacy was no disincentive to the pursuit of salvation. However, it is likely that Henry, the father of Hamo the Reeve of Canterbury, was a widower, and put off the religious life until after his married life was over. Celibacy was thus a natural part of the later life cycle and allowed him to seek the 'sixty-fold reward' of widowhood in the monastic life.¹⁸ For Henry, and perhaps other men adopting the religious life as widowers, Augustine's request could be fulfilled in later life.

These late life recruits to the monastic life seem to have disappeared in the thirteenth century, just as child oblates did. It was probably partly that their interest waned, but more that the changing needs of monastic houses meant that they were a less attractive option than they had been. The increasing importance placed on the celebration of masses meant that older, and probably less literate, recruits were unlikely to be considered suitable candidates for the intellectual training required for ordination. Moreover, as Marita von Weissenberg has recently demonstrated, there was in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the development of a lay model of sanctity which did not require the adoption of a monastic life.¹⁹ But, as André Vauchez has argued, this was a relatively brief window before the reassertion of a monastic model in the later Middle Ages. The appeal of chastity for laymen in the later Middle Ages is likely to have increased, given both this and the related valuing of celibacy in the priestly context.²⁰ However, monastic influence on lay piety meant that it was possible to live a version of the regular life within a domestic context. For those men who did want to lead the religious life more formally, becoming a secular priest was probably easier to achieve, as will be seen later in the paper.

There has been recognition of the appeal of virginity to women, even to women who were no longer technically virgins, and an acceptance that virginity could in some ways be achieved retrospectively or recuperatively.²¹ However, there has been little attention given to what virginity, celibacy and chastity, especially recuperative versions of these, might mean to men. Virginity, chastity and celibacy all had slightly different meanings, although those meanings could blur. Virginity was the state of never having been

sexually active; it was a state of wholeness and purity, which carried a promise of a hundred-fold reward in heaven, superior to all other states. It could be understood both physically and spiritually, though ideally the two co-existed. However, spiritual virginity was more important: Augustine had comforted nuns with the view that rape of the body was not important provided the will had not consented, and late medieval wives (and perhaps husbands) could also see themselves as spiritually virgin, even if they had borne children, provided they had not experienced desire. For them, a state of celibacy, entered into during or after marriage, when they abstained from sex intending that to be a permanent state, could allow recuperative virginity. Chastity was and remains an ambiguous word, which could mean the virtuous performance of whatever state one was currently in, so the chaste wife had sex only with her husband and desired no one else, and the chaste maid had sex with no one, but expected to after marriage.²² It could also mean, and has often been understood by historians to mean, abstention from sexual activity, so that the phrase 'chaste marriage' has often been applied to couples who chose not to have sex at all. In this respect, modern understanding may oversimplify and dichotomise a more varied medieval understanding. This paper will explore both the relative absence of the consideration of asexuality for laymen in the historiography and its positive presence in the lived experience of a particular group of medieval men.

John Bugge has argued that, up to the twelfth century, virginity, although primarily understood as a female virtue, could be understood as applying also to men, but that the Bernardine eroticisation of virginity led to 'the irretrievable identification of virginity with womankind'.²³ John Arnold argues that the lack of physical markers of virginity in men means that it could not be clearly distinguished from celibacy, and rather than a fixed but vulnerable state, men chose to emphasise the hard work of sustaining chastity or continence. His emphasis is the experience of monks and clergy, rather than laymen, though it might equally apply to them.²⁴ Celibacy, particularly given that it was modelled by the, in principle, spiritually superior clergy, may have been a more achievable and desirable state than virginity for men. However, the cults of virgin bishops suggest that this was an important model to some clergy and laity. The successfully canonised Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford (d.1282) and the unofficial saints Richard Scrope of York (d.1405) and John Dalderby of Lincoln (d.1320) were all considered to be virgins, and provide evidence for continuing late medieval interest in masculine virginity as an ideal.²⁵ Kathleen Coyne Kelly is possibly the only person to have considered lay models of virginity for laymen. Her exploration of the virgin knights in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Mort Darthur* provides evidence of a lay masculine interest in, and audience for, stories about virgin men with whom the audience could identify and aspire to imitate.²⁶ She argues that masculine virginity was so undefined in its own terms that it could only be understood in reference to female virginity. However, Katherine

Lewis has most recently argued for a significant lay male demand for legends of male monastic saints as models of resistance to lechery. She argues that the development of models of the mixed life meant that these saints were seen as particularly appropriate exemplars for laymen. She also points out that both the saints' lives and pastoral literature often characterised striving against sin as a battle which would have appealed particularly to an elite audience or one which aspired to knightly values.²⁷

High status men were also exposed to texts designed both to show them how to exercise authority and, as a corollary, dissuade them from giving in to the temptations of lust lest they be rendered both unmanly and bestial:

sett nought thyn hert in lecherie of women, for þat is the lyf of swine. Ioy and worshiþe shalt thou noon haue, while thou governyst the aftir...the liif of unnesonable bestis...lecherie is destrucciounn of body abreggyng of liif and corrupcioun of vertues; enemy to conscience and makith a man oft femynyne.²⁸

Even without such dissuasive pressures, married laymen did not have untrammelled access to sex. The liturgical year produced at least awareness, and in many cases observance, of regular occasions of abstinence (Fridays and Sundays); episodes of abstinence (quarterly Ember days) and occasional longer periods (Lent, Pentecost and Advent) as well as a medico-religious discourse which discouraged sex during menstruation, pregnancy and breastfeeding.²⁹

One of the potential models which has had relatively little attention paid to it is the chaste marriage of Joseph and Mary. This marriage was used as the template for the development of an ecclesiastical model of marriage in the twelfth century. While the cult of Joseph is a primarily post-medieval development, the cult of the Holy Family did have a medieval existence. This was often represented as a matrilineage, focused on St Anne, but her marriages as well as those of her daughters provided models of appropriate chastity. Representations of Joseph in the visions of St Bridget of Sweden and Margery Kempe, in devotional images of the Holy Family in Joseph's workshop and, perhaps more ambivalently, in guild drama, all testify to his availability as a model for laymen, if not his conscious cult.³⁰ Moreover, while the non-consummated nature of Mary and Joseph's marriage was used as an exemplar to justify the development of consent as the essence of marriage, their marriage was itself used as a model for lay people seeking a way in which to combine the lay state of marriage with virginity, or at least continence.³¹ Indeed, Caxton's life of Edward the Confessor refers to the king as having 'the chastity of Joseph'.³²

A significant proportion of English saints who received a cult, whether papally approved or not, were also virgins. An exploration of male saints included in Caxton's *Golden Legend*, as opposed to a standard edition of the

Golden Legend, shows the extent to which the English collection showed an interest in local saints and saints who were either virgins or celibate.³³

The Ryan and Ripperger continental edition contains three English cults, though only one of those was probably thought of as a specifically English saint: St Thomas of Canterbury, St Fursey, and St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins. St Fursey is a now (and probably even in the late medieval period) obscure bishop saint, whose account is attributed to Bede. The account refers solely to the putatively deathbed battle between angels and devils for Fursey's soul. The battle won by the angels, Fursey lived some while longer, enabled to perform good works.³⁴ The text is more in the tradition of the purgatorial vision rather than a conventional *vita* and says nothing about sexuality. The Ursula account relates that she was the daughter of a British king but rather more emphasis is given, as might be expected, to the Virgins' martyrdom in Cologne, the centre of their late medieval cult.³⁵ Only Thomas of Canterbury can be seen as an unequivocally English saint, reflecting England's relative paucity of saint-making, or at least limited ability to export the cult of its saints.³⁶ The Legend here reflects conventional representations of Thomas's austerity and martyrdom and does not address celibacy or chastity, except briefly in the miracle of a lady who came to pray at the tomb and 'through vanity and a desire to be more alluring' asked for dark eyes, and instead was rendered blind, at least until Thomas relented.³⁷

By contrast, the Caxton edition had significantly more saints from the British Isles, indicating that Caxton had augmented the text to appeal to an English-speaking audience.³⁸ The majority of these were British or Anglo-Saxon saints, and so primarily monastic or episcopal, and all male.³⁹ While virginity and celibacy cannot be said to be explicitly dominant themes in these lives, it was an implicit practice for most, and it is noticeable that several, such as Edmund the Confessor and the archbishop Edmund of Abingdon (d.1240), were described as virgins or, like St Erconwald, as 'chaste of his body', or, as in the story of St Dunstan who applied his heated blacksmith's tongs to the nose of a devil which appeared to him as a woman in an attempt to lure him sexually, as being particularly attached to celibacy. However, the most extensive discussion of virginity comes in the life of St Edward the Confessor.

This is a particularly important Life, as it is one of the longest in the text, and as the life of a king, was imitable to a degree, by laymen. Whether Edward's lack of an heir was an accident, the product of a refusal to give the throne to a son who would be a descendant and tool of the Godwinsons, or indeed the result of a vow of chastity, it had profound political consequences.⁴⁰ As such, the reason for Edward's childlessness came under some scrutiny in the post-Conquest period but, by the late twelfth century and Edward's formal canonisation, Edward had been retrospectively constructed as a virgin king. Caxton's account gives us a late medieval view of the king and of the value of virginity. Edward's virginity was a symbol of wholeness and a guarantor of

peace in his kingdom. Even before he became king, a bishop had a vision in which St Peter commended Edward's chastity and promised a paradisaical vision in whose 'tyme shalle be plente of pees...and grete haboundanuce of corn and fruyte. And this Royamme shall be prosperous in alle thynges'.⁴¹ Once king, Edward's vow of chastity inevitably came into conflict with his council's desire for his marriage. However, he agreed to marry and,

the maryage was solempnyssed and accomplyssed by the holy sacrament, he and the quene avowed to lyue to gydre chaste secretly, that noman knewe it but god allone. The was bitwene them a louyng spousehede withoute bodily knowyng of dede, chast embracynge withoute defloracion of vyrgynyte. Ther was bytwene them veryly chast loue, withoute fleshely towchyng and knowing...And this none knewe the veray trouthe of his chast lyf whyles he lyved, but the very clenness of his mynde was suffyscyent wytnes of his chastyte.⁴²

The king's virginity is presented in the text as the guarantor of proper and orderly sexuality and fertility in others, so it has a positive engagement with marriage and sex. One of the positive effects of the king's virginity is the peace of the land, a contrast with the years of Danish attack before his accession when, 'was grete tyranny, murthre, oppresyng of wymmen, as wyves, wydowes, and maydens ageynst their wylls'.⁴³ Moreover, one of his miracles was to cure a young wife who was barren and had an infection in her cheek 'full of corrupt humours whiche engendryd fowle wormes...soo that she was abhominable to her husbond'.⁴⁴ Edward washed her face, and made her whole.

Then she prayed the king that he would pray to God for her that she might have a child by her husband, for she had been long barren. And the king promised her so to do. And then she returned joyously home to her husband, and soon after conceived and had a child.⁴⁵

Virginity is thus presented not as a denial of sexuality, but as a necessary precondition for the proper performance of sexuality by others.⁴⁶ This may have been helpful for laymen, particularly oldest sons, and members of the elite raised to consider that the perpetuation of the lineage was an important part of their role. Spiritual children could be seen as equivalent, or even superior to, children of the flesh. It has sometimes been argued that the struggle for self-control necessary for a life of continence appealed to men as this was a pre-eminently masculine value but, while I would not disagree with this evaluation, the Life of Edward gives no indication that this was an issue.⁴⁷ His desire was for virginity and there is no suggestion that this was remotely problematic. While this may be part of hagiographic idealisation, it is interesting that male virginity could be presented as entirely straightforward.

Finally, virginity was also a promise of salvation and of bodily resurrection.

Towards the end of the Life, St John the Evangelist sends Edward a message that ‘within six months he shall be in the joy of heaven with me, where he shall have his reward for his chastity’. This promise also provided foreknowledge of death and the opportunity of proper preparation for it, something that was highly desirable in the context of the late medieval concern to make a good end. After his death, ‘whan they loked on his naked body, they sawe it shyne with a marveyulous brightnesse for the clernes of his vyrgynyte’.⁴⁸ The text here is hinting at that common expectation of the preservation of virginal flesh and its promise of the physical resurrection at Judgement Day, an expectation that was confirmed by subsequent investigation of Edward’s tomb and discovery of his incorrupt body.⁴⁹ This text then encompasses many of the promises of virginity and presents them as attainable by devout married men.

The extent to which the virginal marriage was practised in the English context is impossible to establish. The most famous exemplars are European, as is perhaps not surprising given the relative paucity of saint-making activities in the English context.⁵⁰ Dyan Elliott discusses the range of practices which could be understood as spiritual marriage.⁵¹ The most thoroughly documented case of a specifically virginal marriage was that of Elzear of Sabran and Delphine of Puimichel, which took place in 1300. Delphine persuaded Elzear to a virginal marriage, but they did not make formal public vows of chastity until 1316, although he drew up ordinances in 1307–10 which imposed chastity on his whole household. The marriage ended in 1323, on Elzear’s death, though Delphine maintained a devout life focused on proselytising chastity and virginity and the practice of charity. Elzear was rapidly considered for canonisation in 1327, though it was not agreed until 1369. Delphine, too, had a process in 1363, three years after her death, but it was not successful.⁵² In the secondary literature, there has been some discussion of men’s practice of spiritual marriage, but more focus on women, even where, as in case of Elzear and Delphine, there was to be a more immediate cult of the man. Virginal marriages are generally assumed to be at the instigation of the wife, as Elliott argues ‘female initiative is considerably more pronounced in unconsummated unions’ partly on the basis of some well-known cases such as the early Legend of St Cecilia or that of Catherine of Sweden, daughter of Bridget.⁵³ Women’s use of pious devotion more generally, and vows of chastity more specifically, as a means to have control over their own lives, has been a strong element in feminist medieval historiography – ‘the sense of female autonomy and responsibility...can also be discerned’ but it risks underestimating men’s interest in chastity as well as risking reinscribing modern conservative views of men’s ‘natural’ interest in sex and women’s lack of desire.⁵⁴ It is important that we find ways of using gender that do not occlude the agency of either party, nor project modern gender constructions on to the past.

The very popular Life of St Alexis presents a male proponent of virginal marriage and, as Vauchez makes clear, Elzear of Sabran was raised in a milieu which strongly valued virginity and can be shown to have been creating a chaste household well before he and Delphine made public vows.⁵⁵ In the English context, there was clear anxiety about Henry VI's willingness to consummate his marriage, and the suggestions that were made at the time that the child Margaret of Anjou produced was not his son, were in part predicated on a view that the queen was more interested in sex than the king.⁵⁶

However, as Vauchez makes clear, the adoption of abstinence more commonly took place during the course of the marriage rather than at its commencement.⁵⁷ The continent marriage seems to have been a development of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The *Humiliati* and the *Ordo Poenitentiae* of north Italy both offered married lay people the opportunity to live continent lives within a religious context.⁵⁸ But the life of St Hedwig of Silesia indicates that it could be found in central Europe too.⁵⁹ For the *Humiliati*, abstinence may have marked the de facto end of marriage and its replacement with a communal religious life but, for Hedwig, a sexual phase of marriage and the production of children were succeeded by an abstinent marriage. This model, which allowed for the normal performance of the secular requirements of marriage before the adoption of continence, was much less socially disruptive than virginal marriage. And Elliott acknowledges that continent marriages were more likely than virginal ones to be male instigated, citing Giovanni Colombini (d.1367), Roberto Malatesta (d.1432) and Maurice Czasky (d.1336) among others.⁶⁰

The continent marriage achieved after a number of years can be demonstrated from the late medieval English context. The cases of Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, and Margery Kempe, are well-known as women who took vows of chastity during the course of their marriage but they are by no means the only ones. William de Sibbilton and Isolde his wife took a joint vow of chastity in 1321.⁶¹ In 1451, Peter Percy sought priest's orders on the grounds that his wife, Elizabeth de Holm, aged over sixty, had taken a vow of chastity three years before and that they had not cohabited for twelve years.⁶² In 1479, Henry Andrewe and his wife Alice made joint vows, he as a hermit, she as a vowess.⁶³ Another possible case is that of Joan and Thomas Wombwell of Whitkirk near Leeds. When Thomas died, he left the bed in the 'ladischamber' to his widow but the bed in his own chamber to his son, indicating that the two were sleeping apart. They had not however, formally taken a vow of chastity, as Joan was to do that a fortnight after Thomas' death.⁶⁴

While these records of vows taken allow us to see individuals significantly below the elite status of most of Elliott's subjects engaged in continent marriages, they do not provide the broader detail to be found in canonisation processes or spiritual biographies. Occasionally one can see more detail in the

margins of other documents: in 1410, William Pountfret, well-to-do draper and widower, lived in a house in Coppergate, facing All Saints, Pavement, York. Next door lived John Thornton, also a widower. Pountfret shared his house with Dame Christine Pountfret, a vowess. It is not clear what the relationship between them was: they may have been brother and sister or brother and sister-in-law. Thornton married Agnes Grantham, a recent widow, who had fled her home after being abducted and threatened with rape by another man. Agnes moved in with Christine and they shared a room, although Agnes also periodically returned home to run her business and look after her poor neighbours, and also spent a lot of time in All Saints. Goldberg suggests that the relationship between Agnes and John Thornton was a chaste marriage 'as appropriate to an elderly man and a devout and probably middle aged widow'.⁶⁵ But the Pountfret household also looks as though it functioned like a chaste marriage, even if the two protagonists were not married. Continent marriages were appropriate to older people as the 'heat' which powered lust cooled in old age leading to a decline in sexual desire.⁶⁶

It is not clear in these less known cases that the women were necessarily the protagonists. For the Sibbiltons, it was a joint vow; Henry Andrewe's vow is recorded ahead of his wife's, although it may have been a mutual decision; and only in the Percy case does it seem as though the wife was the initiator, though her husband's delay might be as much about the educational requirements of the priesthood as about his lesser enthusiasm for the religious life. It is not possible to say who was the initiator of either the Pountfret or the Thornton household arrangements, though it is likely that John Thornton initiated the marriage with Agnes. It may be that in less high status households, presentation of the wife as initiator was less important. However, what the evidence above shows is that, in the English context, the mutual vow was relatively uncommon. Of the English cases known, only the Sibbiltons appear to have made a mutual vow. Both Margaret Beaufort and Margery Kempe made vows while they were married, but this does not seem to have been shared with their husbands. In England then, men rarely made this vow, even if chastity was the outcome they sought.

In the English context, the vow of chastity was gendered female, as the term vowess indicates. A man who wanted to make a formal commitment to chastity generally needed to use other language, or another role to do it. Elliott has pointed out that the men who initiated continent marriages usually did so as a first stage in entering some formal religious role.⁶⁷ Henry Andrewe became a hermit, while Peter Percy became a priest, although in both cases their primary concern was chastity. Andrewe promised 'to be chaste fro thys tyme forward, and to lyf in fastyng, prayer and werkes of pety; and shall never leve this habit whil I lyf and promitte to lyf stably in this avowe after the order of hermettes duryng my lyf'.⁶⁸ Percy prioritised the desire to live in chastity over priest's orders. In the English cases, if not in the continental ones,

chastity was the main focus of these men's concerns, even if that is not immediately apparent from the form of religious life that they adopted. Indeed, it is possible that we have misinterpreted the main significance of the life of the hermit in late medieval England. Virginia Davis has argued that the appearance of an *ordo* for the profession of hermits in a number of English pontificals of the late fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries represents a desire to regulate men who chose to imitate the 'lifestyle of the of the desert fathers while performing labouring functions useful to society' but, as she acknowledges, all of the texts focus on the swearing of chastity by the candidate.⁶⁹ What this suggests is that chastity was central to the conception of the role of the hermit. The separation and the labouring were the means by which men mostly without the financial, social or educational capital which would have allowed them to become monks or priests, could both sustain themselves and lead a recognised religious life. And while the vocation of the hermit had a long history, the appearance of the *ordo* in this period may reflect an increased interest in its adoption.

Among Elliott's husbands who initiated a continent marriage in order to move on into religion, two founded religious houses and a high proportion of the remainder entered the third order Franciscans.⁷⁰ In England, however, the third orders never became established and so more traditional roles had to be adopted. By the fourteenth century, the monastic life was not an option for older recruits, as monasteries usually restricted entrance to younger candidates, and after the Black Death were often struggling economically. In some cases though, monasteries took in corrodians. Corrodies are often seen in purely economic terms, but there has often been an assumption that women living within the precinct were participating in the religious life of the house – and there is no reason to think that was not also true of men living within the precinct.⁷¹ For those who did not, or could not, aspire to the corrodian's life, there remained essentially two possibilities: hermits for less learned men, and priests for the more.

In the English context, the vow of chastity was far more likely to be taken by a woman on widowhood rather than in marriage.⁷² Given the much more extensive evidence for women taking vows after marriage rather than during it, there was probably an English preference for continence as a post-marriage phenomenon, rather than for chaste marriage. Late medieval English society had a specific role for the holy widow, but not so clearly for the widowed man. The ideal of holy widowhood existed for men, but there was no formal role as a direct male equivalent of vowess. It seems likely that we have previously failed to notice the significance of the chaste life of the hermit, but this was a role primarily for men of lower status. Men of higher status seem to have preferred to become priests after the death of wives. As historians of women, we often complain about the lack of documentation which reflected women's experiences, but this is a case where the specificity of men's

experience is obscured both by the lack of a male equivalent to a clear female role and historians' unwillingness to recognise the appeal of chastity to men.

The growth of the cults of St Armel and St Jeron in late medieval England also suggest an interest in chastity as an aspiration for laymen. St Armel was a Welsh missionary to Brittany who had been a knight in his earlier life, but who became a hermit and subdued a dragon. His cult in England was encouraged by Henry VII who credited him with having saved him from shipwreck, but it may well have existed before that. Armel is depicted wearing a chasuble and leading the dragon by his stole. The subduing of the dragon, as with St George, was often thought of as a metaphor for the control of lust.⁷³ St Jeron was a Flemish saint, known in the English context from a number of rood-screens in Norfolk. Jeron was an aristocrat who had rejected his status in order to become a priest, and who was subsequently martyred. He was conventionally depicted in armour with a chasuble over the top, and sometimes carried a falcon. As such, he was model for the high status laymen who wished to enter the priesthood in adulthood.

William Canynges (c.1402–1472) is probably the best documented of the English men who adopted a post-marital life as a priest, although it is the first sixty or so years of his life which have been the main focus of study.⁷⁴ Canynges was a wealthy and successful merchant in Bristol, with marked similarities to John Brunham of Lynn, the father of Margery Kempe, so the two may be said to come from a similar cultural milieu, though Canynges was a younger contemporary of Margery.⁷⁵ Canynges was heir to a mercantile dynasty, so it is unlikely that he was given much choice about his path in life. The life choices, including marriages, of eldest sons were as much, or more, constrained by the needs of family as were those of the daughters of the mercantile elite. Nevertheless there is no reason to think that he was a reluctant merchant or husband. By 1429, he was married to Joan, probably the daughter of John and Joan Milton, who were later commemorated in his chantry of St George. He had two sons, both of whom were to predecease him.⁷⁶ Canynges built an extensive mercantile empire, trading with Iceland, France, Prussia and Spain. At its height, his fleet probably consisted of eleven ships, of which four were named after the Virgin Mary, two after St Katherine and one each after St Margaret and St Nicholas, that is seven were named after virgin saints and the eighth after a saint who gave dowries to poor girls so that they could preserve their virginity until marriage rather than become prostitutes.⁷⁷ While naming ships after saints, especially the Virgin, was common, the emphasis on virgin saints here looks like a policy, especially when combined with the dedications of the two chantries he established in later life, St Katherine and St George.⁷⁸

Something a little more than conventional piety is indicated by the licence granted in 1454 to Canynges, Joan, their son William and his wife, to have mass celebrated in their home.⁷⁹ And he may have been influenced by his

mother, who having been widowed a second time, in 1429 'in her pure widowhood and legitimate power' granted two tenements to the vicar of St Mary Redcliffe, for a rose rent.⁸⁰ However, William junior was to die without issue in 1458. Canynges does not seem to have been unduly concerned for the preservation of the family line, for it was not until 1464 that he finalised the negotiations for the marriage of his remaining son John, and in the end John, too, would predecease him.

In the 1460s, Canynges's interests turned to preparing for the afterlife as he 'had been occupied through very many years in business transactions, thereby increasing his worldly possessions, but with old age coming on, his thoughts had turned from earthly to heavenly things'.⁸¹ The foundation charter of his chantry in the chapel of St Katherine, in St Mary Redcliffe, is dated 8 September 1467. In it, his wife Joan was still alive, as she was included with him as a beneficiary of masses for their good estate, but she died very soon after, because on 19 September Canynges was admitted to the order of acolyte in the chapel of the College of Westbury on Trym by the Bishop of Worcester.⁸² In subsequent ceremonies at the bishop's manor of Northwick, he was made subdeacon in March, deacon on 2 April, and priest on 16 April 1468. While dating clauses on foundation charters could be symbolic rather than precisely accurate, there is a clear association between the two events. It was technically possible for Canynges to be admitted as acolyte during his wife's life, as that was a minor order and not incompatible with marriage, but the subsequent ordinations were only available to an unmarried man and it is more likely that becoming an acolyte was a response to widowerhood. The speed with which the progression to priesthood took place was not uncommon for a man fully of age and capable of the requirements of the office, but it may suggest that it was something which Canynges had planned for. There are clear parallels with vowesses, most of whom took their vow within a year of their husband's death, and often very much more quickly.⁸³ It has been suggested that this may have been to prevent family or others pressing them into remarriage and there is certainly a parallel here. Robert Ricart the town clerk of Bristol recorded for this year:

This yere the saide William Canynges Maire shulde haue be married, by the kyng our souerain lordes commaundement as it was saide. Wherefore the said Canynges gave vp the worlde, and in al haste toke orders vpon hym of the gode bisshope of Worcestre callid Carpynter, and was made preest and sange his furste masse at Our Lady of Redeclif the yere folouyng.⁸⁴

Rycart was writing some years after the event and it is not clear how much he would have known of the reasons for Canynges's decision, a decision that was of such importance that it was the only event recorded for the year, in a part of the calendar where not every year received an entry.⁸⁵ Edward IV had known Canynges since at least 1460, when Canynges loaned him 500 marks, possibly

before he became king, and in 1461, Canynges, as mayor, hosted Edward's visit to Bristol. If Edward was indeed pressuring Canynges, then his decision to preserve both chastity and independence, the same motives attributed to women becoming vowesses, led to similar behaviour. Canynges was subsequently to adopt a semi-regular life as initially a canon and then in 1469, Dean of the College of Westbury on Trym (which he had helped to finance), before his death in 1474.⁸⁶ Whether Canynges was indeed resisting a marriage the king had in mind or putting into place a long-established plan, as his smooth transition to the clerical life suggests, it is evident that in later life his preference was for chastity over marriage.

Conclusion

This has necessarily been a sketch of a late medieval masculine engagement with celibacy and virginity. It is evident that some men were interested in virginity and celibacy as a practice of their own, not just to be supervised in their womenfolk. Virginity and virgin marriage were ideals to be read about but perhaps less often to be imitated by the laity, but they did help in the development of the practice of continent marriage, for spouses who were in middle or later years. They probably rarely took formal vows at this stage of their lives, even when men were the initiators of the continent marriage, because it was a peculiarly difficult path for men to negotiate, perhaps particularly in the English context, where the model of vowed chastity was institutionally and linguistically feminine, and where it was primarily associated with widowhood. Men chose more conventional forms of the religious life, although it may be a modern blind spot not to see the importance of chastity in the life of the hermit, and its evidence that chastity was not just an interest of elite laymen. Moreover, this was usually a later life choice, and paralleled the adoption of vowesshood by women. As Augustine had suggested, chastity and continence might be considered in youth, but more appropriately adopted in maturity.

Notes

I am grateful to my colleague Katherine J. Lewis for helpful discussions on this paper.

1 'da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo'. Augustine: *Confessions* ed. J. J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 8.7.18, online edition at <<http://www.stoa.org/hippo/frames8.html>>.

2 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London and Boston: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.128–30, 387–427.

- 3 John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975); Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000); Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (eds), *Medieval Virginites* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003). Of these, Bugge acknowledges that virginity could apply to men as well as women but does so entirely in the context of monasticism, Kelly devotes one chapter to male virginity, and *Medieval Virginites* two out of twelve papers. See also, Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Virginia Blanton, 'Chaste Marriage, Sexual Desire and Christian Martyrdom in *La Vie Seinte Audrée*', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19 (2010), pp. 94–114; Malcolm G. Underwood, 'Politics and Piety in the Household of Lady Margaret Beaufort' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987), pp. 39–52; Malcolm G. Underwood and Michael K. Jones, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); P. H. Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows: Medieval Female Piety in the Province of York', *Northern History* 32 (1996), pp. 21–41; Mary Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-century Vowesses', in Anne F. Sutton and Caroline Barron (eds), *Medieval London Widows, 1300–1500* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1994), pp. 165–83; Mary C. Erler, 'English Vowed Women at the End of the Middle Ages', *Mediaeval Studies* 57 (1995), pp. 155–203; Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 4 John M. Bowers, 'Chaste Marriage: Fashion and Texts at the Court of Richard II', *Pacific Coast Philology* 30 (1995), pp. 15–26; Katherine J. Lewis, 'Becoming a Virgin King: Richard II and Edward the Confessor', in Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (eds), *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 86–100; Joanna Huntington, 'Edward the Celibate, Edward the Saint: Virginity in the Construction of Edward the Confessor', in Bernau, Evans and Salih (eds), *Medieval Virginites*, pp. 119–40.
- 5 Katherine Lewis, 'Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity in Late Medieval England', *Gender & History* 24 (2012), pp. 112–33; Marita von Weissenberg, '"What Man are you?" Piety and Masculinity in the Vitae of a Sienese Craftsman and a Provençal Nobleman', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (eds), *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 112–25.

- 6 Robert Wintemute and Mads Andenæs (eds), *Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Partnerships: A Study of National, European and International Law* (Oxford and Portland, OR: Hart, 2001); Steven Seidman, Chet Meeks and Francie Traschen, 'Beyond the Closet? The Changing Social Meaning of Homosexuality in the United States', in Christine L. Williams and Arlene Stein (eds), *Sexuality and Gender* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), pp. 427–45.
- 7 Celibacy in the monastic context has been more thoroughly explored, and the size of the phenomenon has led to its exclusion from this discussion. Nevertheless, monastic celibacy provided both a cultural presence of celibate men and a potential model for laymen.
- 8 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*.
- 9 Most recently, Helen Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West: c.1100–1700* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
- 10 J. A. F. Thomson, *The Early Tudor Church and Society, 1485–1529* (Harlow: Longman, 1993), pp. 168–72, 198–200; Peter Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 142–73; Tim Cooper, *The Last Generation of the English Catholic Clergy* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 169–78; Helen L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).
- 11 Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation*, pp. 144–6.
- 12 P. H. Cullum, 'Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval England', in D. M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp. 178–96; Michelle Armstrong-Partida, 'Priestly Marriage: The Tradition of Clerical Concubinage in the Spanish Church', *Viator* 40 (2009), pp. 221–53; Jennifer Thibodeaux, 'Man of the Church or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy', *Gender & History* 18 (2006), pp. 380–99; Janelle Werner, 'Promiscuous Priests and Vicarage Children: Clerical Sexuality and Masculinity in Late Medieval England', in Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (ed.), *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 159–84; Michael Frassetto (ed.), *Medieval Purity and Chastity: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York and London: Garland, 1998).
- 13 L. Legrand, 'Saint Paul et célibat', in Joseph Coppens (ed.), *Sacerdoce et célibat: Études historiques et théologiques*, BETL 28 (Gembloux: Duculot and Louvain: Peeters, 1971); Roman Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West* (Leominster: Fowler Wright, 1988); Brown, *Body and Society*;

- Christian Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990); Susanna Elm, *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Valerie A. Karras, 'A Re-Evaluation of Marriage, Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13 (2005), pp. 111–21.
- 14 Maureen C. Miller, 'Why the Bishop of Florence Had to Get Married', *Speculum* 81 (2006), pp. 1055–91; Sharon T. Strocchia, 'When the Bishop Married the Abbess: Masculinity and Power in Florentine Episcopal Entry Rites, 1300–1600', *Gender & History* 19 (2007), pp. 346–68; Conrad Leyser, 'Episcopal Office in the Italy of Liutprand of Cremona, c.890–c.970', *English Historical Review* 125 (2010), pp. 795–817.
 - 15 Jo Ann McNamara, 'The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150', in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 3–30.
 - 16 Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities, 500–1100: Patterns of Expansion and Decline', in Judith M. Bennett et al. (eds), *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 261–92, here p. 226.
 - 17 C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (1984; 2nd edn, London and New York: Longman, 1989), p. 126.
 - 18 Katherine Clark, 'Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16 (2007), pp. 170–71. The 'sixty fold reward' is a reference to the parable of the sower in Mark 4:1–20, especially 'Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown'. Augustine himself used the parable in *The City of God* which, he said, was built in three storeys 'they may be supposed to represent those three harvests in the gospel, thirty-fold, sixty-fold, an hundred-fold, – chaste marriage dwelling in the ground floor, chaste widowhood in the upper, and chaste virginity in the top story', online edition at <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XV.26.html>>. From Augustine it was adopted more widely in the early church and thence in the medieval period. Thus it became an expression of a widespread understanding of a hierarchy of sexual continence: marriage was good and better than fornication; but better was chaste widowhood, the absence of sexual activity after its legitimate expression, and best of all was virginity. If you could not manage virginity then abstinence after marriage was still a very good thing, and a good way

to prepare for one's final end.

- 19 von Weissenberg, 'What Man are you?'
- 20 André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 368–9.
- 21 Bugge, *Virginitas*; Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity*; Salih, *Versions of Virginity*; Bernau, Evans and Salih (eds), *Medieval Virginites*. Retrospective virginity is the attribution to an individual usually after death as an explanation of observed phenomena such as lack of children or an incorrupt body as well as piety of life, whereas recuperative virginity is the recovery of a spiritual rather than physical virginity, as such the former was not an interior experience as was recuperative virginity.
- 22 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 180–82; Felicity Riddy, 'Temporary Virginity and the Everyday Body: *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and Bourgeois Self-Making', in Nicola McDonald (ed.), *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 197–216.
- 23 Bugge, *Virginitas*, p. 135.
- 24 John H. Arnold, 'The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity', in Bernau, Evans and Salih (eds), *Medieval Virginites*, pp. 102–18.
- 25 P. H. Cullum, 'Virginitas and Virilitas: Richard Scrope and his Fellow Bishops', in P. J. P. Goldberg (ed.), *Richard Scrope: Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), pp. 86–99.
- 26 Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, pp. 93–118.
- 27 Lewis, 'Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity', pp. 112–33.
- 28 *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta secretorum*, ed. Robert Steele, Early English Text Society, Extra Series 74 (London, 1898), p. 14. I am grateful to Katherine J. Lewis for this reference.
- 29 André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices* (Notre Dame, IN and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 189.
- 30 Christina M. Fitzgerald, *Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture* (Gordonville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 79–86. But see discussion of Hermann-Joseph in Carolyn Diskant Muir, 'Bride or Bridgroom? Masculine Identity in Mystic Marriages', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (eds), *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 69–73.

- 31 Bugge, *Virginitas*, pp. 84–6.
- 32 The edition used here was accessed via *Early English Books Online*. Jacobus, de Voragine, *Legenda aurea sanctorum, sive, Lombardica historia*, published by Wyllyam Caxton (London, 1483), hereafter Caxton, *Golden Legend*.
- 33 *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, tr. and adapted by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Arno Press, 1969). This version is based on the Latin edition by Graesse, (Leipzig, 1850), p. xvi.
- 34 *Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, pp. 96–9.
- 35 *Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, pp. 627–31.
- 36 *Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, pp. 68–71.
- 37 *Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, p. 71.
- 38 For a discussion of Caxton's sources and reworking of the *Golden Legend*, see Lewis, 'Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity', pp. 112–16.
- 39 The well-known English female saints Ethelburga and Etheldreda receive passing mention, but are downgraded to 'holy women', while Hilda of Whitby and Werburga of Chester are entirely absent.
- 40 The suggestion that Edward actually took such a vow has been described by Frank Barlow as 'obviously absurd'. Frank Barlow, 'Edward [St Edward; known as Edward the Confessor] (1003x5–1066)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edn, May 2006, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8516>>, accessed 16 June 2012.
- 41 Caxton, *Golden Legend*, fol. CCCxxiii r/v.
- 42 Caxton, *Golden Legend*, fols CCCxxiv verso; CCCxxv.
- 43 Caxton, *Golden Legend*, fol. CCCxxiii.
- 44 Caxton, *Golden Legend*, fols CCCxxvi verso; CCCxxvii.
- 45 Caxton, *Golden Legend*, fol. CCCxxvii.
- 46 Katherine Lewis has also argued for the 'spiritual fertility' of the virgin or celibate male saint in relation to other English saints in her 'Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity', pp. 121–2.
- 47 Arnold, 'Labour of Continence', pp. 117–18; Lewis, 'Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity', p. 122.
- 48 Caxton, *Golden Legend*, fol. CCCxxix verso.

- 49 Caxton, *Golden Legend*, fol. CCCxxxi.
- 50 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 3–15.
- 51 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 287–93.
- 52 Vauchez, *Laity in the Middle Ages*, pp. 191–5.
- 53 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 267.
- 54 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 219.
- 55 Vauchez, *Laity in the Middle Ages*, pp. 192–3.
- 56 Joanna Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445–1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 133.
- 57 Vauchez, *Laity in the Middle Ages*, pp. 185–90.
- 58 Vauchez, *Laity in the Middle Ages*, p. 188. Frances Andrews, *The Early Humiliati* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 176–201.
- 59 Vauchez, *Laity in the Middle Ages*, pp. 185–90.
- 60 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 266 and Appendix 6.
- 61 *Register of William Melton, Archbishop of York, 1317–40*, vol. 1, ed. R. M. T. Hill, Canterbury and York Society, vol. 70 (1977), p. 11.
- 62 *Calendar of Papal Letters*, vol. 10, p. 212. 13 February 1450–51.
- 63 Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York (BI). Register of Archbishop Laurence Booth, fol. 96v.
- 64 BI, Probate Register 2, fol. 266r–v; *Testamenta Eboracensia: Selection of Wills*, vol. 3, ed. James Raine, *Surtees Society* 30 (1855), p. 332.
- 65 P. J. P. Goldberg, ‘Space and Gender in the Later Medieval English House’, *Viator* 42 (2010), pp. 205–32, here p. 232.
- 66 Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 85.
- 67 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 209. ‘For three out of the four men who provided the impetus for a vow of chastity, spiritual marriage was a transition to a more formal, institutionalised renunciation of the world.’
- 68 BI, Register of Archbishop Laurence Booth, fol. 96v.
- 69 Virginia Davis, ‘The Rule of St Paul, the First Hermit, in Late Medieval England’, in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*,

- Studies in Church History 22 (1985), pp. 203–14, esp. pp. 203, 206–9.
- 70 Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, Appendix 6.
- 71 Richard I. Harper, 'A Note on Corrodies in the Fourteenth Century', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 15 (1983), pp. 95–101; James Clark in a recent paper has also noted the number of laymen and secular clergy who continued to choose to live within the monastic precinct, often in later life, and who shared an experience of the monastic life. James G. Clark, 'Why Men Became Monks in Late Medieval England', in Cullum and Lewis (eds), *Religious Men and Masculine Identity*, pp. 160–83.
- 72 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', pp. 29–30; Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses'.
- 73 Samantha J. E. Riches, 'St George as a Male Virgin Martyr', in Riches and Salih (eds), *Gender and Holiness*, pp. 65–84; Hanneke van Asperen, 'Saint Armel of Brittany: The Identification of Four Badges from London', *Peregrinations* 2/1 (2005), pp. 33–40, <http://peregrinations.kenyon.edu/vol2--1/FeaturedSection/Armel_1.pdf>.
- 74 Clive Burgess, 'Canynge, William (1402–1474)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4581>>, accessed 21 June 2012.
- 75 Canynge was five times mayor of Bristol and served as MP. John Brunham was five times mayor of Lynn (now King's Lynn) and served as MP.
- 76 Edith E. Williams (ed.), *The Chantries of William Canynge in St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol* (Bristol: William George's Sons, 1950), p. 44.
- 77 The names of two other ships are unknown. William Worcestre quoted in Williams, *Chantries*, p. 59.
- 78 *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar by Robert Ricart, Town Clerk of Bristol, 18 Edward IV*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, *Camden Society New Series* 5 (1872), p. 80.
- 79 Williams, *Chantries*, p. 56.
- 80 Williams, *Chantries*, p. 53.
- 81 'quamplures annorum curriculos secularibus negociis multiformiter explicatus honesto cum labore mercatoribus rem augere domesticam industrie curauerim imminente michi tandem debilitate senili animaduertens mundiales sucessus prosperos orbisque gloriam et splendorem instabiles et ficticios quasi in ictu oculi multociens euanescere

sumamque felicitatem in rebus celestibus'. Williams, *Chantries*, p. 255.

82 Williams, *Chantries*, p. 66.

83 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', p. 33.

84 *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, ed. Smith, p. 44.

85 Clive Burgess, 'Ricart, Robert (fl. 1478)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23473>>, accessed 21 June 2012.

86 Burgess, 'Canynges, William'.

Common Soldiers, Same-Sex Love and Religion in the Early Eighteenth-Century British Army

Susan Gane

This chapter explores the intersection of gender and religion in the early eighteenth century army using the autobiography of Private Sampson Staniforth (1720–1799), and in so doing raises more questions than it answers. Staniforth served in Flanders during the War of the Austrian Succession of 1739–1748 and was caught up in the minor religious revival there, part of the contemporaneous international evangelical revival closely associated with John Wesley. He was converted to Methodism by fellow private Mark Bond (d.1747) and the two men began a very close emotional friendship. In later centuries the story of Sampson Staniforth and Mark Bond, ‘the swashbuckling selfish sot and the sensitive man who, with downcast eyes, trudged at his side’ would become familiar to students of Methodist history. Twentieth-century historians, however, have de-emphasised the episode. In this chapter I explore this relationship, and examine its impact on the army and on Methodism rather than seeking to attach the label ‘homosexual’ to these historical figures.¹

In his historiography of same-sex friendships from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries, Alan Bray has warned of the problems of our modern inability ‘to conceive of relationships in other than sexual terms’. He comments on ‘the rhetoric of a passionate attachment that had tactfully negotiated its dangerous uncertainties’ and ‘the common terrain potentially occupied by the “sodomite” and the male friend’, showing how such friendships were celebrated in romances, ballads, chapbooks and folk songs. Bray also considered the important part played by religion in such relationships.² All of these points resonate throughout my discussion below. The historiography of sexuality in the early eighteenth century primarily covers the metropolitan ‘Molly’ culture of effeminacy and sodomy revealed in court records and the homosocial institution of the British Navy. Some gender historians consider that during this period sex between men was regarded as relatively acceptable behaviour and outside the metropolitan area was seen as a sin rather than an explicit identity for those who indulged in it. They also stress the complicated ways in which notions of sodomy, homosexuality and heterosexuality have been constructed and related to masculinity, in addition drawing attention to the importance of situational sexuality in the form of sex

between men in all-male institutions such as public schools or prisons when women are not available.³ I begin by summarising Staniforth's life story and discussing it within the contexts of same-sex love and other religious conversion narratives. I then consider the eighteenth-century army's attitudes to sexuality and masculinity, dealing first with the way in which fellow soldiers and officers reacted to the Staniforth / Bond friendship and a similar relationship described in a journal by Corporal Todd, and second with the religious guidance given to soldiers about sodomy. I then discuss the diverse issues relating to the language that Staniforth uses and the reciprocal interaction between Methodism and his story. Finally I draw some tentative conclusions about the light shed by Staniforth's narrative on the emotional lives of common soldiers and on gender and religion in the mid-eighteenth century.

The autobiography of Sampson Staniforth

Sampson Staniforth's autobiography was presented as a conversion narrative which was serialised in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine* between January and July 1783; autobiographies of other prominent early Methodists were published in a similar fashion and edited by Wesley and others.⁴ Staniforth opens his autobiography by signalling that his story is unusual: 'I am sensible my case is peculiar, both in a state of sin and in my conversion to God'.⁵ He was the son of a cutler in Sheffield, apprenticed to a baker at fourteen and it appears that the family were sufficiently well off for his mother often to give him money. Within his social milieu he was a gilded youth, much loved, outrageously badly behaved and generally forgiven. At seventeen he started drinking with soldiers and when he was about nineteen he enlisted on two occasions. The first time his mother bought him out, and, in spite of the fact that he had broken his contract, his master, according to Staniforth 'received me very kindly, and did not upbraid me with any thing that I had done'.⁶ His regiment was initially stationed in Scotland and when in Perth he seduced a young woman and refused to honour his promise to marry her; she had relatives in a Highland regiment who were determined to kill him but, with her help, he escaped. He was in Flanders from spring 1743, and he wrote that he more than once escaped punishment for disobeying orders which prohibited the men from leaving camp and plundering the locals; he also had an affair 'with a Negro man's wife' who adored him.⁷

We know nothing about private Mark Bond apart from Staniforth's story and a couple of entries about his death in John Wesley's journal. Wesley recorded his day-to-day life in a journal which he later published and his entries for the 1740s include extracts from two letters written in Flanders that mention that Mark Bond was left wounded in the field, 'and whether he be alive or dead we cannot tell'. One of these letters is from 'S S' and the other from an unnamed soldier.⁸ (As set out below, Wesley had met Staniforth, Bond and other

Methodists from their regiment in 1746.) According to Staniforth, Bond came from Barnard Castle in County Durham and was something of a tortured soul, who believed that that he had little hope of salvation because at seven years old he had cursed God. At eighteen, plagued by suicidal impulses, he 'entered into the army, desiring and hoping that he should soon be killed'. He ended up in Staniforth's company who observed that they 'could never get him to drink with us; but he was always full of sorrow; he read much and was much in private prayer'.⁹ Although we do not know if Bond was ever married, he saved money from his modest pay to send to his friends back in England. In Flanders Bond listened to the army revivalist preachers and was infected by their religious ecstasy. He became obsessed with the idea that he must convert Staniforth. He 'could not shake me off his mind,' recounted Staniforth. 'He could not rest, either day or night, but it was on his mind "Go to Sampson"'. Bond approached Staniforth on successive occasions and told him of the horrors that awaited him unless he converted and about his feelings and sufferings; Staniforth admitted that he would 'make sport of all he had said'. Then one day, when Staniforth was hungry and without money or credit Bond bought him food and drink and took him to a revival meeting outside the army camp. There Staniforth was converted and from that day onwards he wrote, he 'was never more overcome by liquor, though I had been so enslaved to it for several years'.¹⁰ Bond 'took me to be with him as his comrade, and watched over me, as a tender parent over a beloved child,' observed Staniforth. Bond suggested that they put their pay together and live frugally until his debts were paid off. During this time the two men began a campaign to recruit fellow soldiers to Methodism, and gained eight converts in their regiment with many others coming to listen to their preaching. Staniforth was wracked with guilt, and while in winter quarters at Ghent he records:

my sorrows increased. It was strongly suggested to me, that my day of grace was past, that I had sinned the unpardonable sin, and it signified nothing to strive any longer...I thought myself the most miserable creature on earth, far beneath the brute and inanimate creatures: all of which answered the end of their creation, which I have never done! ¹¹

His mental torture continued for some weeks until one night when on guard duty Staniforth saw a vision of Christ on the Cross, and became convinced that his sins had been forgiven.¹² After this experience he took what was probably the first unselfish action of his life: he wrote to his parents about his conversion and asked his mother not to send him any more money because he had learned to live within his pay. His friendship with Bond had become very emotionally intense. Before the battle of Fontenay in May 1745, for example, he described the way in which 'my dear companion and I had sweet communion together, having constant and strong confidence in God'.¹³ After the battle the lieutenant of the regiment sent for Staniforth and asked him to be his servant in place of a man who had been killed. 'It was not a command,'

wrote Staniforth, 'but a favour offered, which he left to my choice'. He refused, explaining that as an officer's servant he would be unable to attend preaching or to meet his Christian friends, and would have to break the Sabbath. Soon afterwards he was transferred to the artillery, which needed men to replace those lost at Fontenay. This was effectively a promotion since his pay was nearly doubled, and Staniforth had no choice but to leave Bond and his friends.¹⁴

The transfer was short-lived, however, as his regiment was ordered back to England to help suppress the 1745 Jacobite rising. Aside from a brief foray in the north the regiment was deployed near London to guard against any attack on the city. They were quartered at Deptford and, with the permission of their officers, Staniforth and a few others went twice a week to London to hear Wesley preach. (They must have met Wesley because they corresponded with him when they returned to Flanders.) He also met his future wife there, marrying in June 1746 when his regiment was ordered back to France. The marriage was an advantageous match since his wife was wealthy enough to send him a promissory note for fifteen guineas to buy his discharge. This was a lot of money for a private in the foot who was paid around nine pounds a year, plus his uniform. Bond accepted the marriage according to Staniforth and 'was fully persuaded that I should get out of the army. But he prayed that he might not live to see it. And he believed, God would grant his request'.¹⁵

Despite his wife's request, when Staniforth reached Flanders he delayed applying for a discharge because a battle was anticipated and he did not want to appear cowardly. Now a thoroughly reformed character, he no longer plundered or stole, although he was often hungry, and the regiment marched through vineyards and orchards where there was plenty of available fruit stripped by other soldiers. Outside Maastricht, a detachment including Staniforth's regiment was ordered to distract the French while the main army retreated to winter quarters. Bond was wounded twice and left behind when the regiment was ordered to retreat; he must have died subsequently. 'It seemed as if I had lost part of myself,' wrote Staniforth with feeling, 'I could have wished, that I had died by his side'.¹⁶

Having lost his friend Bond, Staniforth quickly sought to leave the army and his colonel agreed to discharge him for the fifteen guineas if he would act as his servant until they returned to England. Staniforth agreed, and in early 1748 he rejoined his wife at Deptford. He settled there and began a successful business, remaining a fervent Methodist and building several chapels in the local area. Eventually he became a preacher and, when in his sixties, was asked by Wesley to write his autobiography.¹⁷

In analysing Staniforth's narrative, his description of his early years in the army is strikingly similar to Alexandra Shepard's description of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Cambridge students who adopted 'inverted codes of manhood rooted in excess and clamorous misrule'. According to Shepard,

being part of a group was central to these exploits, providing both validation of claims to manhood and 'a largely unacknowledged source of male intimacy during this most homosocial phase of the life course'.¹⁸ Unlike Shepard's students, however, Staniforth and his fellow privates were in no sense members of the elite, and army life may well have been attractive to them precisely because it offered opportunities for an unbridled masculinity that was harder to secure in civilian life. Bond, of course, did not indulge in these excesses yet he developed an (arguably homoerotic) obsession with Staniforth, and was seemingly unable to rest until he had introduced him to Methodism. As mentioned previously, he also hoped to die before Staniforth left the army and therefore his dear friend. Bond won Staniforth's affection, partly due to his generosity in a time of need but also through opening the way to mutual spiritual enlightenment, fellowship and leadership; together the two men recruited other Methodists, and reproved the sinful behaviour of others. When Bond took Staniforth as his comrade in a loving relationship, they effectively became partners not dissimilar to a marriage insofar as they pooled their pay in order to clear the latter's debts. As testimony of his own affection for Bond, Staniforth refused to leave him to become an officer's servant, and postponed leaving the army until after his death.

It not clear from Staniforth's account whether or not the two men had sexual relations, although phrases such as having 'sinned the unpardonable sin, and it signified nothing to strive any longer', 'I thought myself...far beneath the brute and inanimate creatures' and 'my dear companion and I had sweet communion together' are highly suggestive of this. Historians have expressed concerns, however, about confusing descriptions of religious ecstasy with homoeroticism. They have also expressed differing views on the prevalence of sodomy in early modern England. According to Thomas Betteridge, for example, 'everybody knew that sodomy was a terrible, cosmic sin, or crime against nature's and God's order', whereas Randolph Trumbach has suggested that approximately two-thirds of men had sexual relations with 'the sodomitical minority' and in rural England, until circa 1850, could do so without threatening their masculinity.¹⁹ Bray initially claimed that 'homosexuality existed on a massive and ineradicable scale' in early modern England, and that society was reluctant to recognise the existence of love and sex between men, rather than being tolerant of it, but was to modify these views to some extent in his later work, *The Friend*.²⁰

Staniforth's enigmatic phrase 'the unpardonable sin' crops up in a number of conversion narratives published or republished between 1740 and 1782, including John Bunyan's *Amazing Grace*. Bunyan agonised for a year believing that he had committed the unpardonable sin and was damned because he had cast off Jesus before deciding that no one who had sinned 'the unpardonable sin' could receive the sort of spiritual comfort that he did. The diaries of two women, Lydia Allen and Ann Olding, who died at around age

twenty, were published by their relatives and follow Bunyan's model, although both these diarists seem to have found spiritual comfort more quickly. Allen was probably an Anglican and Olding was a 'Protestant Dissenter'.²¹ Thomas Ward 'belonged to one of the liberal professions', seemingly in London and died young. He was 'wrested and poisoned by blasphemous temptations' and thought 'no less than that I had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost', but after a long struggle resolved the issue through reading the bible.²² One further example seems to be fiction, and is attributed both to famous author and dissenter Daniel Defoe (d.1731) and to Thomas Woodcock (d.1695). The work, which went into at least four editions before 1744, is in part a part conversion narrative, part celebration of a disreputable life, the protagonist experiencing temptations 'about the unpardonable sin, backed with some terrible expressions in scripture' and the text suggesting both religious and sexual definitions of the sin. An example of the latter is 'intimacy breeds familiarity, till wanton dalliances commence, which often end sadly; especially where but two persons engage, privacy giving nerves to the temptation.' Eventually the protagonist comes gradually to God by attending church services and listening to sermons.²³ Staniforth's story stands out from these diverse accounts in his claim that it was another person who 'strongly suggested' he had committed 'the unpardonable sin'. Lydia Allen attributed her agonies to her own fears, for example, and the others blamed the promptings of the devil. I explore the range of contemporary meanings of the phrase 'unpardonable sin' further below.

Staniforth's autobiographical account was written nearly forty years after Bond died and was almost certainly influenced by the formula of other conversion narratives, as well by the editing of Methodist worthies. It follows a conventional enough pattern: a period of an agonising sense of sin followed by 'intimate communion with a loving God, and feelings of joyous assurance'.²⁴ As noted earlier, however, it also includes details specific to his own experience including the fact that his guilt was suggested to him by another person and that his vision of Christ on the cross came to him while he was in on sentry duty in winter quarters in Ghent.

Military attitudes to sexuality and masculinity

The reaction of Staniforth's fellow soldiers to his spiritual and emotional partnership with Bond was extreme. 'The change which God wrought upon me, gave a great alarm, not only in our company, but throughout the whole regiment' and his old companions 'called me many names'. He and Bond had begun 'to reprove sinners, to invite them to hear the preaching, and to exhort as many as would hear, to turn to God and flee from wrath to come'.²⁵ Such behaviour not only provoked considerable annoyance but threatened directly the dominant military culture of whoring and drinking among Staniforth's old friends. As Shepard notes, frequently 'male intimacy associated with

individual friendships...was regarded with fear and suspicion'.²⁶ Thus Staniforth's fellow soldiers may well have felt that one of their most virile companions forming a loving partnership with another soldier threatened their masculinity as well as his own. If this assumption is correct, it provides an interesting gloss to Bray's and Trumbach's views concerning the prevalence of sodomy in early modern society, suggesting that although sexual acts between men did not necessarily threaten their masculinity, very close and intimate relationships between them did.

The officers' reaction to Staniforth's partnership with Bond supports this theory. When Staniforth refused to leave Bond and become his lieutenant's servant he was transferred to another corps, effectively a promotion since artillery pay was higher. Yet when his corps returned to Flanders in 1746 after Staniforth's marriage, no attempt was made to transfer either him or Bond out of their regiment. This may well have been because as a married man, Staniforth's loving friendship with Bond would have been less threatening to the dominant heterosexual military culture. A further example of the army's adverse reactions to a same-sex friendship between two common soldiers (privates and non-commissioned officers) was that of Corporal William Todd and Sergeant Major Barnsley. Todd kept a journal of his army life and records that in c.1756 his close friend Barnsley was given an ensign commission in the 60th Regiment of Foot in the American colonies. Barnsley wanted Todd to go with him, as did Todd, but he recorded that 'our Lt Col Sir William Boothby would not admit me to go upon no account'. According to Todd, the regiment reacted by trying to stamp out all possibility of partnerships between common soldiers of different ranks:

our Major Chapman gave orders that no sergeant should drink with the corporals nor corporals to drink with the private soldiers nor soldiers to drink with drummers neither to keep company with each other but the sergeants and corporals to carry sticks and beat the soldiers as they so occasion to keep them at a distance in not making themselves so free with them.²⁷

It remains unclear as to whether or not the officers were most concerned about friendships between common soldiers of different ranks threatening sexual morality, army discipline, or both.

In terms of the officers' reactions to the Staniforth / Bond friendship, after the two men had become close friends two officers invited Staniforth to be their servant; seemingly none had done so before. Is it possible that they also wanted him as a sexual partner? According to Trumbach, elite men who enjoyed sex with other men often did so with their servants; Bray also notes the extent to which sodomy occurred between masters and servants. In the army, officers' servants were fighting men publicly funded on the same rate as privates. Officers lived in a largely homosocial world on campaign abroad, as

it was unusual for them to be accompanied by their wives, and it seems likely that some of them may have indulged in situational sexuality. (In contrast, common soldiers were accompanied by significant numbers of women camp followers and would have been able to access local prostitutes more easily.) Sodomy, whether or not it was consensual, had been a felony since the early sixteenth century, but witnesses were hard to find for consensual sex because both partners were subject to the death sentence. Officers seeking servant / same-sex partner arrangements would have had to ensure they were consensual, thus Staniforth was freely able to refuse the offers made by his lieutenant and colonel.²⁸

Sodomy certainly featured in army life, although evidence of this for the eighteenth century is sparse. Robert Newburgh, chaplain of the 47th Regiment of Foot, was charged with buggery by several individuals in 1774. Although the charge was never proven a number of regimental officers accepted it was true. A further eighteenth-century example was the prestigious London-based Horse and Foot Guards, who were notorious for 'their easy prostitution' with other men. Common soldiers were also prone to blackmailing elite men, accusing, or threatening to accuse them of sodomy; in 1759 gangs of soldiers used such blackmail techniques to rob seemingly innocent men in St James Park. Trumbach has suggested that this indicates not only that they were underpaid and had time on their hands, but also the fact that soldiers were often solicited for sex by more prosperous men.²⁹

In civilian society the Society for the Reformation of Manners prosecuted sodomites from the early eighteenth century; in 1726 fifty-six men were tried for sodomitical practices. Throughout the eighteenth century sodomy was a felony and tens, perhaps hundreds, of people were executed for the crime; but in civil trials most suspected sodomites were accused of assault, which was a misdemeanour, easier to prove and punished by prison or the pillory. Regimental courts martial tried lesser crimes in the army and it was usual for them to try lesser forms of statutory felonies as misdemeanours: punishment for privates was almost invariably flogging with the cat-of-nine-tails. Common soldiers, however, do not seem to have been flogged for sodomy in the eighteenth century. G. A. Stepler examined four hundred cases heard by regimental courts martial for the 44th Regiment of Foot between 1778 and 1784. The bulk of the offences were defined as stealing and misbehaviour on duty with none of them explicitly involving a sexual offence, although there were twenty-odd cases of 'general misconduct'. Similar work on some ninety cases in the 18th and 65th Regiments of Foot in 1774–5 showed that that stealing and behaving badly on duty loomed large with drunkenness important in two thirds of the offences, but that sodomy did not feature.³⁰

I have found no evidence to indicate that army officers in general regarded the sexual practices of common soldiers, as opposed to partnerships between them, as their business. However Josiah Woodward, an Anglican clergyman

and moral reformer involved with the Society for the Reformation of Manners wrote a tract, *The Soldier's Monitor*, which was published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.³¹ This took a strong line against sodomy. Five thousand copies were printed in 1701–2 and it was distributed free to troops on several occasions during the eighteenth century.³² As Woodward declared:

...above all other sort of uncleanness, let your soul abhor the very thoughts of that unnatural and abominable kind of it, which brought fire from heaven upon Sodom, and which derives its infamous name from those filthy wretches. This is a monstrous piece of villainy, condemned to death by the laws of God and man, and ought to be chased from off the earth, by the general abhorrence of mankind. For hereby men sink below the utmost irregularities of the shameless beasts; and one would wonder, that such a monstrous wickedness could ever be admitted into the heart of any one that deserves the name of a man. And therefore I pray you treat it always with the utmost scorn, and the most implacable indignation.³³

In contrast Woodward merely condemned extramarital sex with women for weakening a man's fighting spirit, and involving him in 'base and shameful intrigues'.³⁴ Overall, therefore, it appears as if the army left trying to discourage its men from unconventional sexual behaviour to the religious authorities.

Masculinity, religion and 'the unpardonable sin'

In Ghent someone, probably another Methodist soldier, told Staniforth that he had committed 'the unpardonable sin' and that there was no hope of salvation for him. I investigated the range of meanings of this term in the Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) database. ECCO consists of every significant title printed in the United Kingdom during the eighteenth century as well as many important works from the Americas. A search for the phrase 'the unpardonable sin' in the full texts of works published or republished between 1740 and 1782 produced over a hundred distinct publications, including the five conversion narratives by Bunyan, Allen, Olding, Ward and Defoe/Woodcock discussed above. The most common definition of the phrase was rooted in biblical texts from the gospels of Matthew and Mark whereby anyone calling Christ's miracles the work of the devil or otherwise blaspheming against the Holy Ghost 'hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation'. Other publications defined the term in a wide variety of ways including treason, deserting a pregnant wife and, more light-heartedly, gluttony and bad manners.³⁵

The ECCO search also produced four publications explicitly linking sodomy with 'the unpardonable sin', nevertheless making clear that sodomy was actually *not* unpardonable. Samuel Pike (?1717–1773) was a preacher,

biblical scholar and the author of a number of books. A controversial character, he left the Independents and was later excluded by the Congregationalists. He explicitly targeted ‘such as have been guilty of the detestable sin of Sodom’. According to Pike,

some persons are afraid they have committed the unpardonable sin...and are ready to think all ground of hope is gone. But what ever the unpardonable sin is; without enquiring into its nature...we have not been guilty of it, if we find any humbling sense of sin.³⁶

He added that there was no mercy for those who continue in sin. Other writers were more ambiguous. Samuel Finley (active 1740–1750) was a Presbyterian minister and leader of a revivalist faction in the American colonies. He wrote ‘it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgement than for’ those who commit ‘this unpardonable sin...against the Holy Ghost’.³⁷ Marie Huber (1695–1753) was a translator and the author of a number of religious works. She queried whether there can be an unpardonable sin given that Christ died for all men and linked the unpardonable sin with eternal fire, adding in a footnote, ‘St Jude says, that Sodom and Gomorrah received the punishment of everlasting fire, verse 7’.³⁸ John Reeve (1608–1658) was co-founder of the Muggletonians, with his cousin Ludowicke Muggleton. They were a minor religious sect sufficiently confrontational for the leaders to be imprisoned in Newgate for six months in 1653–4, and taught that hell was within us and that the devil was a projection of our own fears. In his work *A Divine Looking-Glass*, Reeve wrote about ‘the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost,’ and ‘if an elect vessel hath been left to commit adultery, buggery, murder or such-like’. He concluded that the elect are naturally drawn to repentance, and will be saved. The remainder will not repent but vengeance against them should be left to God.³⁹

These four works were all written by serious philosophical and religious thinkers on the fringes of society. Many clerics must have known that consensual sex happened between men, and have wanted to stop sensitive individuals from torturing themselves about it. Although there is no proof that any of these writers, other than Pike, equated sodomy and ‘the unpardonable sin’, they were not subject to the discipline of larger and more established sects and may have been relatively well placed to deal with this highly controversial issue. The gospels of Matthew and Mark are clear that those who deny Christ’s miracles will never be forgiven, but elsewhere the bible condemns Sodom and Gomorrah to eternal punishment in the form of everlasting fire. According to Bray, James VI of Scotland, later James I of England, told his son ‘that homosexuality was one of the few “horrible crimes” that a King was “bound in conscience never to forgive”’.⁴⁰ Both this King and the Bible condemn sodomy as unpardonable, and there may have been a strand in popular culture that not only agreed with this view but saw sodomy as *the* unpardonable sin. It is possible that Staniforth blasphemed

against the Holy Ghost before his conversion, but he was accused of the unpardonable sin after it; he had not attempted suicide or committed treason. He had seduced and deserted a girl in Perth and it is likely that he had on occasion been gluttonous and bad mannered, but these were common vices and few people took them seriously enough to suggest there was no hope of salvation for those who committed them.

Overall, therefore, a small proportion of works published in this period linked sodomy and unpardonable sin, and the Biblical epistle of Jude can be read as doing the same thing. Staniforth tells us that early in their relationship Bond gave him ‘a piece of an old bible’, and he probably read it avidly. It is likely that all of the early Methodists in Flanders were enthusiastic bible readers and they may well have interpreted the term ‘unpardonable sin’ in unorthodox ways, such as defining it as sodomy. But there remains no firm evidence that this was the case.⁴¹

Methodism and Staniforth's story

The following section explores the historiography of the connections between Methodism and same-sex love, and the shifts in the way that some Methodist historians have presented Staniforth's story over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Early Methodism was a religion of the unlearned, which encouraged its adherents to make their own spiritual judgements even in defiance of church authority. The historiography suggests that it might also have influenced the way in which sexual feelings were expressed. According to Henry Rack there is some evidence for E. P. Thompson's view that Methodism stifled sexual and other natural impulses, ‘or sublimated them into a holy eroticism’.⁴² David Hempton also draws attention to Methodist leaders’ ‘passionate attempts to impose a degree of religious discipline amid the psychological disturbance...[and]...sexual repression...that wafted around early Methodism’. John Walsh has argued that ‘the conversion experiences of the first Methodists show...spiritual yearning, religious doubt, sexual difficulty’.⁴³ Henry Abelove's more direct exploration of sexuality and Methodism cited evidence that early Methodists ‘found sanction in what Wesley said...for releasing same-sex sexual feeling’ and gave examples of Methodist converts kissing everyone in the same room.⁴⁴

Staniforth's story can be read as illustrating the ways in which erotic attraction, religious ecstasy and puritan virtues might have merged. Bond interpreted his obsession with Staniforth, for example, as a holy impulse to save his soul. To some extent the two men's close relationship encompassed all of the Methodists in their regiment ‘who were closely united together and were joined in such love for one another, that we had in effect all things in common’. Such very close religious bonds could easily mask sexual feelings.

Although Staniforth had seduced women before he met Bond, and married afterwards, Bond helped him when he was in greatest need. The fierce religious zeal of his social circle seems to have helped Staniforth to emerge from his agonised soul-searching and perhaps to see his partnership with Bond as sanctified by faith. Faith certainly transformed him from a selfish wastrel into a morally scrupulous and unselfish man; notably, after taking up with Bond, Staniforth overcame his addiction to alcohol. Methodism offered both an anti-alcohol ethos and intensive social support in small groups not dissimilar to the practice of the modern organisation, Alcoholics Anonymous. Overall Bond and Staniforth decided that their relationship was a beneficial one, and it did achieve considerable good for themselves and for others.⁴⁵ But if Methodism sanctified the Staniforth / Bond relationship what then was its attitude to same-sex love? Clerics, especially Methodist clerics, were often poor gentlemen who could not afford to marry until they were well past the first flush of youth. Some clerics were accused of sodomy and Robert Newburgh's case has been discussed above. In 1735 a member of his congregation accused Andrew Gifford, then the Baptist minister at Little Wild Street in London, of sodomy in his youth. The charge was not proved, but Gifford was ostracised by other Baptists; he formed a new congregation in Eagle Street with many of his former flock. The fact that these men were clerics may have made them more vulnerable to such public accusations.⁴⁶

Early on in his career John Wesley himself had shown an 'unconventional sympathy with same-sex eroticism'.⁴⁷ In 1729, Wesley, who was an ordained Anglican priest and a fellow of Lincoln College Oxford University, formed the Holy Club, where he developed the ideas and practices that led to Methodism as a religious movement.⁴⁸ The Holy Club visited prisoners in Oxford's two jails, with the approval of the prison governors and the bishop, and took up the cases of individual prisoners. One of their protégés was a Mr Blair, who Wesley thought suffered from 'unjust persecution'.⁴⁹ Another Anglican clergyman living in Oxford at the time, Thomas Wilson, recorded in his diary for 22 November 1732 that he had 'rather a warm dispute about the Methodists taking the part of Blair who was found guilty of Sodomitical Practices and fined 20 marks by the recorder'. He thought that the Holy Club's intervention gave 'a countenance to a man who the whole town think guilty of such an enormous crime. Whatever good design they pretend it was highly imprudent and has given the occasion of terrible reflections'.⁵⁰

Almost immediately afterwards Wilson recorded the case of a Mr Pointer, chaplain of Merton College of some forty years standing. Pointer was ordered to leave the college following a complaint by a student that he had got him into his room, urged him to drink and 'would have offered some very indecent things to him'. Pointer had been suspected of sodomitical practices for a long time but it had not been possible to secure evidence to convict him. Wilson thought Pointer should, like Blair, have faced a public trial in the civil courts;

‘how should we otherwise free ourselves from the guilt and judgements that hang over us’.⁵¹ Like the army, Oxford University was a homosocial institution and it seems that sodomitical practices were by no means unknown among University staff. In another incident in 1739, Robert Thistlethwayte, the warden of Wadham College broke bail and fled the country rather than face charges at the Assizes. He had been accused by a student, his butler and barber and unusually we have details of his bad behaviour: kissing his servants and tickling their breeches. The only Oxford fellow to be loyal to him, a John Swinton, faced accusations of similar behaviour from the son of a servant. This boy later denied his allegation and Swinton survived unscathed.⁵²

These stories show that a handful of clerics at Oxford University touched male students and servants in sexual ways and could sometimes get away with so doing. They are relevant because they demonstrate that Wesley knew that homosexual feelings and associated behaviour occurred in both elite and plebeian circles. Wesley published Staniforth's story in spite of its hints at same-sex love; it is possible that he wanted to show that salvation was open to everyone who led a good Christian life.

More generally both social elites and some sectors of the general population suspected Methodists of sexual perversion. Satirists indulged in ‘lurid fantasizing about Dionysian excess, unspeakable orgies at society rooms and lovefeasts’ amongst Methodist groups who were also accused of hosting orgies. Nocturnal Methodist meetings were a particular focus for the attacks and they seem to reflect fears that Methodism threatened family life as well as traditional hierarchies.⁵³ Wesley, who must have realised that it was very unwise for him to appear to authorise any unconventional sexual behaviour, advocated celibacy as the ideal to his followers, with marriage as the second best option.⁵⁴

It would also have been similarly unwise for later Methodism to celebrate unconventional sexual behaviour; the way in which Methodist historians have portrayed Staniforth's story, for example, has changed over time in very interesting ways. In c.1820 Robert Southey, the ‘poet laureate who took his duties as a bulwark of good order very seriously’ included it in his *Life of Wesley*. Southey emphasised Staniforth's staunch support of Methodism in his later life in Deptford and criticised Wesley for failing to explain that the vision of Christ on the cross was a dream. Southey was careful to omit any hint of sex: he did not mention the seduction of a girl in Scotland, for example, use the term ‘the unpardonable sin’ or discuss the two officers who asked Staniforth to be their servant. Instead, he explained Mark Bond's obsession with Staniforth as ultimately religious – he ‘could think of no one who stood more in need of...spiritual medicine’.⁵⁵ In 1865 the Wesleyan Minister Thomas Jackson included the story in full in his six-volume *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* including the more suggestive sexual aspects.

Jackson's work 'went into several editions and became the standard account of the history of the early years of Methodism'.⁵⁶ Nearly forty years later in 1903, Mrs Frank Stephens produced a one-volume abridged version of Jackson's *Lives*, but her version of Staniforth's story seems to have been very carefully edited. She did not mention Bond by name, and omitted the seduction in Perth, the fact that someone else suggested Staniforth had committed 'the unpardonable sin', and also Bond's wish to die before Staniforth left the army. Although Staniforth usually referred to Bond as his 'dear companion', Stephens replaced this with simply 'companion', except when describing Bond's death. In 1905, in *Wesley and His Century*, W. A. Fitchett described the Staniforth / Bond partnership as 'a friendship of the antique sort', but similarly omitted key parts of the story. 'By some strange impulse' Fitchett wrote, 'he [Bond] chose the worst man in the company, Staniforth, as his confidant'. He does not mention 'the unpardonable sin', the officers asking Staniforth to be their servant, or Bond's wish to die before his friend left the army. And in 1949, the Methodist historian, Leslie Church, asserted the key importance of the Staniforth / Bond story to Methodism, but described their friendship as 'strange' without any further explanation.⁵⁷

In summary, adherents of early Methodism often confused religious ecstasy and sexual feelings, contemporaries suspected the new sect of lurid orgies and early on in his career Wesley flirted with sympathy for sodomites. Later, as previously noted, he advocated celibacy to his followers. Methodism, therefore, seems, on the one hand, to have enabled Staniforth and Bond to form a very close and possibly sexual relationship, while simultaneously enabling fellow Methodists to condemn that relationship as unpardonable. The eighteenth-century Methodist historian Thomas Jackson saw only the positive aspects of the Staniforth / Bond relationship and promoted it as a model for others to follow. Twentieth-century Methodist historians recognised its overtones of unconventional love; the story became increasingly embarrassing, key details were censored and its transgressive aspects rendered it too odd to be emulated. Such signalling echoes Staniforth's own language in introducing his story: 'I am sensible my case is peculiar'.

Conclusions

Staniforth's story casts a rare beam of light on the interlinked issues of masculinity, sexuality and religion in eighteenth-century army life, but it is only one man's story, written many years after the events it describes with little corroborating evidence to support it. This essay has explored a number of possibilities: that the two men committed sodomy; that the eighteenth-century army, and specifically Staniforth's fellow soldiers and officers, regarded intimate partnerships between two men as threatening masculinity in a way that sexual acts between them, however deplorable, did not; and that Wesley was sympathetic towards sodomitical behaviour. These remain just

possibilities and more research is needed to clarify such issues. However, regardless of the interpretation of these contentious points, Staniforth's story provides us with a fascinating insight into the inner life of common soldiers and the interactions between gender and religion in the eighteenth-century army.

Staniforth's narrative describes a passionate male friendship that became part of popular culture. The friendship was promulgated as an example for others in Methodist circles to follow until, perhaps, our modern obsession with sexuality led to it being played down by later historians. Staniforth started life as a philanderer, adulterer and a drunkard, but his relationship with Bond redeemed him, and he became a faithful partner, as well as a sober, devout and active Methodist. Bond died in 1747, but Staniforth's love affair with Methodism lasted for the rest of his life. This is still an inspirational story of redemption through love, and I think it a pity that our ambivalence about same-sex love prevents us from celebrating it.

Notes

The author wishes to thank the staff at Birkbeck, especially Sean Brady, the other contributors to this volume and especially the editors for advice and comments on this paper.

- 1 Leslie Frederic Church, *More about the Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), pp. 12, 14.
- 2 Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago, Ill. and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 2, 30–34, for quotations see pp. 6, 212, 318 and for religion, pp. 81–2, 293 and 300.
- 3 For the Molly culture and the reliance on court records see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), pp. 86, 102; Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 58, 68; Randolph Trumbach, 'Modern Sodomy : The Origins of Homosexuality, 1700–1800', in Matt Cook et al. (eds), *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Greenwood World, 2007), pp. 77–105, esp. pp. 82, 100. For the 'normality' of sex between men, see Bray, *Homosexuality*, p. 79; Trumbach, 'Sodomy', pp. 77–8, 88, 93; Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, pp. 64–5. For the construction of masculinity with respect to various forms of sexuality, see Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), esp. pp. 1–2, 23, 116; Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 27–9, 95, 122, 124–5; Bray, *The Friend*, pp. 183, 318; Bray, *Homosexuality*, p. 104; H. G. Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality', in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook

- (eds), *The Modern History of Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 157–79, here p. 175. For situational sexuality, see Brady, *Masculinity*, p. 17; Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 51–2.
- 4 Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (1989; 3rd edn, London: Epworth Press, 2002), p. 423.
 - 5 Sampson Staniforth, 'A Short Account of Mr. Sampson Staniforth: in a letter to the Rev. Mr Westley', *Arminian Magazine* 6 (1783), p. 13.
 - 6 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 13–15, quotation p. 15.
 - 7 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 15–19, quotation p. 19.
 - 8 Titles in the ECCO database are catalogued in the English Short Title Catalogue available at <http://www.estc.bl.uk>. Citations here to ECCO titles are followed by their ESTC citation number. John Wesley, *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, from Oct. 27, 1743, to Nov. 17, 1746*, vol. vi (London, 1779), English Short Title Catalogue citation no. (hereafter ESTC) N31229, pp. 156–159, quotation p. 159.
 - 9 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 66–7, quotation p. 67.
 - 10 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 67–8 incl. quotations.
 - 11 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 70–72, incl. quotations.
 - 12 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', p. 72.
 - 13 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 122–4, quotation p. 124.
 - 14 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', p. 183.
 - 15 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 184–5, 237–8, quotation p. 238. See below for his discharge and G. A. Stepler, 'The Common Soldier in the Reign of George III, 1760–1793' (doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1984), p. 43 for the pay of a private in the foot.
 - 16 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 239–243, quotation p. 243.
 - 17 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', pp. 243, 294–299.
 - 18 Shepard, *Meanings*, pp. 94–5, 120–121, 125, quotations pp. 95, 125.
 - 19 H. G. Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality', in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds) *The Modern History of Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 157–79, here p. 163; Thomas Betteridge, 'Introduction', in Thomas Betteridge (ed.), *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 1–9, here p. 5; Trumbach, 'Sodomy', pp. 77–8, 93, quotation on p. 77; Bray,

- Homosexuality*, pp. 79 (incl. quotation), 76.
- 20 Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 79, 76, quotation p. 79; Bray, *The Friend*, for example, pp. 6, 11, 318.
- 21 John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding...* (London, 1759), ESTC T58505, pp. 88, 91, 112, quotation on p. 91; Anon., *Remarks on the Character of Miss Lydia Allen...* (London, 1740), ESTC T168837, pp. 11, 13, 14; John Olding, *Seeking the Lord...* (London, 1776?), ESTC T116911, title p. and pp. 14–15.
- 22 Thomas Ward, *Records of the Religious Experiences...* (London, 1781), ESTC T105661, pp. 14–19, quotations on pp., 14, 15.
- 23 Anon., *An Abstract of the Remarkable Passages in the Life of a Private Gentleman* (Boston N.E. and London, 1744), ESTC W101034, pp. 18–25, 121–5 et seq., quotation on p. 18. The third, and only other surviving edition, was published in London in 1715. G. C. M. Smith (ed.), ‘Extracts from the Papers of Thomas Woodcock’, *Camden Miscellany* 11 (London, 1907), pp. 49–50. Available at: http://www.archive.org/stream/publications13royauoft/publications13royauoft_djvu.txt> accessed 7 August 2013.
- 24 Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 22, 65, 68, 269, quotation on pp. 18, 25; Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 6, 9, 12, 39.
- 25 Staniforth, ‘A Short Account’, pp. 69–71, quotations pp. 69, 70.
- 26 Shepard, *Meanings*, p. 96.
- 27 William Todd, Andrew Cormack and Alan Jones, *The Journal of Corporal Todd 1745–1762* (London: Sutton Publishing for the Army Records Society, 2001), pp. 14, 270 n. 36, quotation p. 14.
- 28 Trumbach, ‘Sodomy’, pp. 97–8; Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 49, 51, 54; Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 60. For women accompanying the army on campaign see Catriona Kennedy, ‘John Bull into Battle: Military Masculinity and the British Army Officer during the Napoleonic Wars’, in Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettele and Jane Rendall (eds), *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 127–46, here p. 138. For officers’ servants see Alan J. Guy, *Oeconomy and Discipline: Officership and Administration in the British Army 1714–63* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 55.

- 29 Paul E. Kopperman, 'Religion and Religious Policy in the British Army, c.1700–1796', *Journal of Religious History* 14 (1987), pp. 390–405, here p. 395; Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 64; Trumbach, 'Sodomy', pp. 100–03.
- 30 Trumbach, 'Sodomy', pp. 79, 82; Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 60; G. A. Steppeler, 'British Military Law, Discipline, and the Conduct of Regimental Courts Martial in the Later Eighteenth Century', *English Historical Review* 102 (1987), pp. 859–86, esp. pp. 884, 866–7, 872, 876; Steven M. Baule and Don N. Hagist, 'The Regimental Punishment Book of the Boston Detachments of the Royal Irish Regiment and 65th Regiment, 1774–1775', *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research* 88/353 (2010), pp. 5–18, esp. pp. 7, 14–18.
- 31 John Spurr, 'Woodward Josiah (1657–1712)', *ODNB*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55600>> (accessed 24 May 2013).
- 32 Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?: England, 1689–1727* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 237; Kopperman, 'Religion', p. 396.
- 33 Josiah Woodward, *The Soldier's Monitor* (London, 1741), ESTC T182347, p. 22.
- 34 Woodward, *The Soldier's Monitor*, p. 21.
- 35 All biblical texts are from the King James Bible. See Mark 3:29 (incl. quotation) and Matthew 12:32. For publications referring to these texts, see e.g., Richard Baxter, *Dialogues on Personal and Family-religion...* (Shrewsbury, 1769), ESTC T185686, p. 56; Robert Russel, *Seven Sermons...* (46th edn, London, 1757), ESTC N65312, p. 5; Jeremy Taylor, *The Life of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ...* (Dublin, 1742), ESTC T231426, p. 79. For those with other definitions see e.g., Sir Myles Stanhope, *The History of the Several Oppositions which have been made in England...* (London, 1754), ESTC T148123, pp. 43–4; Anon, *The Fortune-hunter: or, the Gamester Reclaim'd. A Play...* (London, 1775), ESTC T183196, p. 96; Philip Thicknesse, *The New Prose Bath Guide, for the Year 1778...* (London and Bath, 1778?), ESTC T4532, p. 111; Anon., *The Female Soldier; or, the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell...* (London, 1750), ESTC T154424, pp. 87–8.
- 36 Samuel Pike, *Some Important Cases of Conscience Answered* (2nd edn, London, 1755), ESTC T80783, pp. 87–99, quotations on pp. 94, 91–2. For Pike, see Alexander Gordon, Rev. Derek B. Murray, 'Pike, Samuel (1717?–1773)', *ODNB*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22262>> (accessed 30 April 2012).

- 37 Samuel Finley, *Christ Triumphant, and Satan Raging. A Sermon on Matth. xii. 28...* (Edinburgh, 1741), ESTC T164444, p. 44, incl. quotations. For Finley, see Melvin Yazawa, 'Rush, Benjamin (1746–1813)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68653>> (accessed 30 April 2012); William S. Powell, 'Williamson, Hugh (1735–1819)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68673>> (accessed 30 April 2012).
- 38 Marie Huber, *The World Unmask'd: or, the Philosopher the Greatest Cheat...Translated from the French*, vol. 2 (2nd edn, London, 1743), ESTC T59679, p. 199, incl. quotation. For Huber see *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), under Huber, Francois (1750–1831).
- 39 John Reeve, *A Divine Looking-glass; or, the Third and Last Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ...* (1658; repr. London, 1760), ESTC T91014, pp. 50, 66–71, quotations on pp. 50, 66. For Reeve see William Lamont, 'Reeve, John (1608–1658)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23297>> (accessed 30 April 2012); William Lamont, 'The Muggletonians 1652–1979: a "Vertical" Approach', *Past & Present* 99 (1983), p. 38.
- 40 Bray, *Homosexuality*, p. 62.
- 41 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', p. 96, incl. quotation.
- 42 Rack, *Wesley*, p. 431; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (1964; revised edn, London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 408–9, quotation p. 408.
- 43 David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 16, 51, quotation, p. 16; J. D. Walsh, 'Elie Halévy and the Birth of Methodism', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th series, 35 (1975), pp. 1–20, p. 5.
- 44 Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 63, 67, quotation p. 63.
- 45 Staniforth, 'A Short Account', especially pp. 68, 70–71, quotation pp. 70–1.
- 46 Edwin Cannan, Rev. Roger Hayden, 'Gifford, Andrew (1700–1784)', <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10657>> (accessed 12 January 2011).
- 47 Abelove, *The Evangelist*, p. 66.

- 48 Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 69, 84.
- 49 Vivian Hubert Howard Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley: a Study of John Wesley and Oxford* (London, 1961), pp. 157–9, 184, quotation p. 184.
- 50 Thomas D. D. Wilson, *The Diaries of Thomas Wilson, D.D., 1731–37 and 1750, son of Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man*, ed. Charles Lawrence Scruton Linnell (London: SPCK, 1964), p. 81, incl. quotations. See also Abelove, *The Evangelist*, p. 66; Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley*, p. 32.
- 51 Wilson, *The Diaries*, pp. 81–2, incl. quotations.
- 52 Green, *The Young Wesley*, pp. 31–3.
- 53 Abelove, *The Evangelist*, p. 73, incl. quotation; Albert Marion Lyles, *Methodism Mocked: The Satiric Reaction to Methodism in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), for example pp. 68, 69–70, 90–1, 132–3; Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 89–90, 92.
- 54 Abelove, *The Evangelist*, pp. 49– 54; Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 122–3.
- 55 Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and Rise and Progress of Methodism*, ed. Rev. Charles Cuthbert Southey (1820; new edn, London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), II, pp. 31–3, quotation p. 33. For Southey see, Geoffrey Carnall, ‘Southey, Robert (1774–1843)’, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26056>> (accessed 1 May 2012).
- 56 Thomas Jackson, *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. 2 (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 1998), pp. 324–352. For Jackson see, W. B. Lowther and Rev. Tim Macquiban, ‘Jackson, Thomas (1783–1873)’, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14554>> (accessed 1 May 2012), incl. quotation.
- 57 Thomas Jackson, *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers (Chiefly Written by Themselves)*, abridged Mrs Frank Stephens (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1903), pp. 105–115, esp. pp. 108–9, 112. Staniforth, ‘A Short Account’ uses ‘dear companion’ on, for example, pp. 68, 69, 124, 185, 242. W. H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century: a Study in Spiritual Forces* (London: Smith, 1906), pp. 225–234, quotations p. 229; Church, *More about the Early Methodist People*, pp. 12, 14, quotation p. 14.

‘Dark Ecstasies’: Sex, Mysticism and Psychology in Early Twentieth-Century England

Joy Dixon

‘This monk can give lessons to lovers!’ The monk was St John of the Cross, the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic; the apparently astonished critic was Arthur Symons, writing in the *Contemporary Review* in 1899. Symons’s comment was quoted in his friend Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism* (1911). Underhill commented: ‘It would be strange if he could not; since their finite passions are but the feeble images of his infinite one, their beloved the imperfect symbol of his First and only Fair’.¹ Underhill both embraced and evaded Symons’s central claim: that this was not simply love poetry, but explicitly erotic love poetry. In the original article, Symons noted that St John spoke to God in Christ ‘as a wife to a husband’:

to San Juan de la Cruz the idea of God is an idea which can be apprehended mentally only by a series of negations; the person of God can be apprehended only emotionally, and best under the figure...of earthly marriage, the marriage of the soul and Christ. At once the door is opened in the seventh heaven of metaphysics for all the flowers in which the earth decks itself for lovers; and this monk can give lessons to lovers.²



Figure 1: Suzanne Schleck. 'Icon of Evelyn Underhill'. Egg tempera and gold leaf on wood. 11" × 14". (2000). Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

In these mystical love-poems, he continued, 'there is an abandonment to all the sensations of love, which seems to me to exceed, and on their own ground, in directness and intensity of spiritual and passionate longing, most of what has been written by the love-poets of all ages'. The lines 'ache with desire and with all the subtlety of desire...In a merely human love they would be almost perverse, so learned are they in sensation'.³

Symons was a well-known spokesman for literary decadence; his own poetry – which included lyrical accounts of illicit sexual encounters – had made him

notorious in literary circles.⁴ Symons's commentary revels in the 'almost perverse' elements in these poems. Underhill, in contrast, criticised those who scoured mystical texts for "'sexual" imagery'. In the 'pure minds of the mystics', she argued, these references to 'Spiritual Marriage' were emphatically not sexual: 'they mean by it no rapturous satisfactions, no dubious spiritualizing of earthly ecstasies'.⁵ In her later work, however, she acknowledged the 'sometimes unattractive foundations' of St John's mystical attainments and, though she continued to praise his later writing, contrasted it to the 'hard and bracing doctrine' of his earlier works which, she argued, were 'utterly free from all insistence on the abnormal'.⁶ How and why she moved from one position to the other reveals the complex mechanisms at work in the intersections of religion, science and sexuality in this period.

While Underhill is relatively little known today, she was, along with William James, a key promoter of the psychological model of mysticism; Gordon Mursell has recently described her as 'the most important scholar of mysticism in the early twentieth century'.⁷ Underhill went on to become one of the most prominent Anglican laywomen of her day, as an author, a popular spiritual director and a pioneer in the Anglican retreat movement. Her books, articles and BBC broadcasts reached a wide audience. As a retreat-leader and spiritual director, she counselled many others, especially women. In 1921, she was invited to deliver the first series of Upton lectures in religion at the Unitarian Manchester College, Oxford; in 1927, she was appointed the first woman fellow at King's College, London; in 1938, she received an honorary doctorate in divinity at the University of Aberdeen.⁸ According to the feminist philosopher and theologian Grace Jantzen, Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961–74, claimed that 'Evelyn Underhill did more than anyone else to keep spirituality alive in England between the wars'.⁹

Underhill was born in 1875, the daughter of a successful London barrister. In 1893, she enrolled in the Ladies' Department of King's College, London, where she studied history, languages, botany and art. Though nominally Anglican, Underhill's family was not devout, and as a young woman Underhill was hostile to institutional religion; her early religious sympathies were deist rather than Christian. In 1904–05, she was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, but she was increasingly drawn to Roman Catholicism and had made the decision to convert by April 1907. Her fiancé, Hubert Stuart Moore, opposed her decision and she agreed to a delay. A few months later, the papal denunciation of religious modernism left her stranded: she believed Roman Catholicism to be the one, true church, and yet she felt that she could not convert without betraying her modernist convictions. For the next fourteen years, Underhill occupied what her biographer, Dana Greene, has described as a spiritual 'borderland'. In 1921, she took two important steps: she became a practising member of the Anglican Church, and she placed herself under the spiritual direction of

Friedrich von Hügel, a Modernist and one of the pre-eminent lay Catholic theologians in England.¹⁰

Underhill was writing at a time when religion in England was being transformed. Under the impact of liberal theology, evolutionary biology, spreading knowledge of other world religions and – most importantly in this context – the new psychology of religion and new sciences of sexuality, religious cultures in Britain were transformed in important ways.¹¹ Some – like the Catholic Modernists – attempted to reconcile science with faith. In response, many of their co-religionists developed new and more conservative orthodoxies: in 1907, Pope Pius X issued the *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, rejecting religious modernism and legislating new oppositions between the Catholic faith and the secular sciences. Or, debates over doctrine and the nature of belief were set aside in favour of an emphasis on the ‘social gospel’, which redefined religiosity as a commitment to social welfare and reform.

Like many of her contemporaries, however, Underhill resisted what she saw as the reduction of religion either to a system of ethics or to a purely intellectual programme, arguing, for example, that the external religiosity of the social gospel movement was ‘the starved life’.¹² As Leigh Eric Schmidt reminds us, historians cannot understand the world of liberal religious thought without recognising the extent to which that world was structured by ‘narratives of desire in which mysticism holds primary interest as part of a search for a living experience of God’.¹³ At the same time, however, in Underhill’s work, as in that of many other commentators on mysticism at this time, considerable effort was expended in distinguishing between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ experiences.¹⁴ In her attempt to ‘modernise’ mysticism by incorporating the insights of the psychology of religion, Underhill was caught up in a dilemma which was itself produced by the historically specific configuration of the relationship between religion (in its liberal modernist form) and science (particularly religious psychology) in the early twentieth century: how to affirm the subjective aspects of the mystical experience, including those sensual and bodily aspects which testified to the ‘reality’ of the experience itself, while simultaneously resisting the tendency to interpret religious ecstasy as a form of sexual pathology?

One of the things at stake for Underhill in this debate was the status of the body in spiritual knowing. As Harry Cocks puts it, ‘after sexology and psychoanalysis it became harder to argue that religious enthusiasm or spiritual comradeship did not have a primarily sexual origin’. In the nineteenth century, Cocks argues, ‘religion had been allowed to be truly queer, in the sense that its cultural prestige and immense social authority meant that it might cover a variety of polymorphous and unspecific transgressions of gender and sexuality, [but] by the early twentieth century religion had come under suspicion and fallen into decay as one of the principal locations for sexual expression of all kinds’.¹⁵ Versions of religious experience that more

easily aligned with dominant images of reproductive heterosexuality – such as Marie Stopes's conflation of heterosexual sex and mystical experience – were more likely to survive this collapse, but the ‘almost perverse’ qualities of mysticism that Symons drew attention to in his article in the *Contemporary Review* became increasingly suspect.¹⁶ According to William James, a new ‘medical materialism’ had led to ‘the fashion, quite common nowadays among certain writers, of criticizing the religious emotions by showing a connection between them and the sexual life’. While James himself rejected this argument – ‘few conceptions are less instructive than this re-interpretation of religion as perverted sexuality’ – it was an important context for Underhill's account of religious experience, in which ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ forms of spirituality were policed alongside and in dialogue with ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ forms of sexual desire.¹⁷

Most commentators agree that Underhill moved from a mystical (Christian) Neo-Platonism to a (much more orthodox) incarnationalist and sacramental theology and – as Paul Marshall summarises it – from ‘concern with personal mystical growth in the early works to a concern with religious community in the later period’, shifts which paralleled those in the broader church.¹⁸ According to Horton Davies, Underhill ‘expressed in her own pilgrimage the religious movement of the whole period as it proceeded from immanentism to transcendentalism, from Liberal Protestantism to Orthodoxy, from private mysticism to public worship, from the individual to the institutional expression of allegiance, and from Theocentric to Christocentric faith’.¹⁹ Todd E. Johnson provides a more complicated account, tracing Underhill's theological development from dualism and ‘Vitalism’ through ‘critical realism’ to a ‘pneumatocentric’ emphasis on the role of the Spirit, which combined elements from the earlier phases.²⁰

Each of these theological positions articulated sensual and bodily experience in profoundly different ways; within Underhill's writings on religious experience we can trace the formation and re-formation of a particular kind of desiring subject.²¹ By paying close attention to the different ways in which body and soul were articulated in her life and writings, it is also possible to reveal some of the forces – social, cultural and theological – which were reshaping relationships between religion and sexuality in early twentieth-century Britain. Underhill's dualist understanding of Christian Neo-Platonism, for example, emphasised the immanence of the divine in the universe and the soul's struggle to free itself from the confines of the material world in order that the ‘spiritual’ elements of the individual could be reunited with the divine, coding the (sexual) body as a hindrance to the spirit. Underhill herself became very critical of this tradition, characterising it as negative and life-denying. Over time, she came to emphasise (although with some ambivalence) the incarnation – Christ's life on earth in the body of a man – as a sign of the sanctity of the human body. In her later work, she returned, via

an emphasis on the sacraments, to the view that spiritual experience had to involve the whole person, the body as well as the soul or mind.²² Each of these positions opened up some possibilities and foreclosed others.

It is tempting to explain at least some of these shifts in terms of Underhill's own life. Her biographers agree that her relationships with her family were lacking in intimacy, and they characterise her marriage – which remained childless – as somewhat passionless, though clearly affectionate.²³ Underhill berated herself for her 'claimfulness', or possessive jealousy, in her relationships with her women friends, and when she approached von Hügel for direction, he advised that though such attachments were partly the result of 'the ardour of [your] natural temperament', they were also 'largely from the too intellectual character of your religion...If you get a greater variety of homey emotions and activities into your religion, you very possibly will lose the hunger for *ardour* of human affection'.²⁴ To read Underhill's search for a richer and more certain experience of God as simply a compensation for the lack of intimacy in her own life is, however, to participate in what Robert Orsi has characterised as the 'modernist impulse', in which the historian goes behind the curtain (like Toto in Oz) to 'uncloak the imposter': 'see, Dorothy, it is social class pulling the levers, or the unconscious, the social or the psychological'.²⁵ The result is to treat religion as always really about something else, underestimating the extent to which theology matters in this process.²⁶ Evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism, for example, inflected relationships between the sexual and the spiritual in very different ways, and with very different results.²⁷ An over-emphasis on the theological, however, returns us to an essentialised religion and a bifurcated understanding of the relationship between belief and culture; the culturalist approach, which works to embed religion in its cultural and social contexts, pushes back in productive and nuanced ways against this tendency.²⁸ Both approaches, however, tend to minimise the ways that *both* sexuality and spirituality were dynamic and historically contingent, mutually re-shaping each other in complicated and contradictory ways.

When *Mysticism* appeared in 1911, Underhill had a small reputation as a minor religious novelist; *Mysticism* made her famous. Her approach was 'avowedly psychological' and her goal was to develop 'a definite theory of the nature of man's mystical consciousness' which did not reduce 'all the abnormal perceptions of contemplative genius to hysteria or other disease'.²⁹ 'Abnormal psychic phenomena' in historical accounts of mysticism had, Underhill argued, become an 'eternal battle-ground' on which 'moderate persons are like to be hewn in pieces between the two "great powers"' of science and religion. Where 'rationalists' believed they had settled the matter by invoking "'auto-suggestion" and "psychosensorial hallucination"', the 'intransigent votaries of the super-natural' defended the literal truth and spiritual origin of even the most bizarre and unlikely miracles.³⁰ In *Mysticism*,

Underhill attempted to find a middle way, defending what she saw as the objective reality of mystical experience against scientific criticism while avoiding what she saw as an unreasoning orthodoxy.

Underhill's work was not simply an historical exercise; her approach in *Mysticism* was in fact deliberately ahistorical. She aimed to introduce her readers to the practice of mysticism. Where the historical approach emphasised the distance between a 'spiritual' past and a 'secular' present, Underhill collapsed time, bringing the mystical experience to life in the reader's present.³¹ But even while inviting the reader to enter into the mystical experience, Underhill raised the possibility that that experience was not an entirely wholesome one. The symbolic language of much mystical writing lent itself, she noted ruefully, to 'many regrettable and some ludicrous misconceptions', among them the belief that 'the "Spiritual Marriage" of St Catherine or St Teresa veils a perverted sexuality'.³² St Teresa of Avila presented special problems for Underhill. It was no accident that secular psychologists had made Teresa the 'patron saint of hysterics': visions and voices played a prominent part in her accounts of mystical experience. She was also, Underhill noted, 'the classic example of th[e] intimate and affective type of contemplation', in which the encounter with a personal and incarnate Christ was characterised as the encounter of 'Lover and Beloved'.³³ Teresa's 'wild and unendurable desire to "see God"', her 'passionate and uncontrollable longing for ultimate Reality' led her to the 'dark ecstasy' of intense and painful concentration on the absence of the Beloved, a 'negative rapture' of insatiable desire.³⁴

Underhill emphasised that the images Teresa employed were 'means rather than ends: means snatched at by the struggling self which has not yet wholly shaken itself free from "image", in its efforts to seize somehow – actualize, enjoy, and adore – that Absolute which is the sum of its desires'. These were, she suggested, the limited and partial efforts of the human mind to convey the experience of encounter with the divine.³⁵ The language of 'Spiritual Marriage' was, according to Underhill, 'temperamental language' and 'related to subjective experience rather than to objective fact'.³⁶ The 'objective fact' of mystical experience was, therefore, secured (for Underhill at least) from the sneers of the psychologists. Underhill presented Teresa's (in)famous 'Transverberation' as a 'great and celebrated vision, or rather experience...in which imagery and feeling go side by side in their effort towards expressing the anguish of insatiable love'. Underhill reprinted Teresa's account without further commentary:

'I saw', she says, 'an angel close by me, in bodily form...I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great

that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it'.³⁷

These images emphasised the tangibility of the encounter with the divine; Teresa's was not simply an intellectual apprehension but also a physical and emotional one.³⁸ These were precisely the passages which psychologists were to mine for evidence of the sexual character of mystical experience. So, according to James Leuba, professor of psychology at Bryn Mawr College, Teresa's memoirs provided clear evidence of 'the participation of the organs of sex in the extraordinary enjoyment of union with the heavenly Bridegroom'. The curious mixture of pain and pleasure in Teresa's account clearly indicated 'the participation of sex organs tormented by an insufficient stimulation'.³⁹ The same elements which, for Underhill, secured the authenticity of the mystical experience became, for Leuba, the clearest evidence of their pathological character.

In *Mysticism*, Underhill's sympathies were not in fact primarily with the language of 'Spiritual Marriage', but with the Neo-Platonist 'metaphysical mystics' who apprehended the divine as an impersonal Absolute. Union – however intimate – with an impersonal principle lacked precisely those qualities which psychologists of religion had focused on as symptoms of 'hysteria' or of sexual neurosis. Underhill later described herself as having been, in her youth, a 'white-hot Neo-Platonist'.⁴⁰ The implications of this approach to sexuality and the body were clear in her earlier novels. In *The Grey World* (1904), for example, the lust of the flesh is the last temptation her hero, Willie Hopkinson, has to overcome before retreating to a monk-like existence in a rural workshop. Elsa Levi, an older and married woman in search of a young lover, attempts to convince him that 'sensual things' could be the symbols of 'a transcendental mystery'. Underhill went on to paint a grim picture of Willie's sexual awakening:

something tremendous had happened...It was hideous, yet it had a horrible fascination. It lived, he perceived, in some black and unsuspected world to which he had never penetrated; yet it was as truly a part of his Ego as the soul that he watched over so carefully.

Still in silence, he saw a monster rear itself up in Mrs Levi's spirit, look at him through her eyes with a horrible longing...

There was distilled from [the silence] some violent impulse; morbid, evil, unspeakable. Willie knew now of pleasures more piercing than the common things of sense, and of the obscure temptations which come to those who have tried to live altogether in the spirit.⁴¹

Many of the elements in this passage – the violent rejection of the body, the effort to 'live altogether in the spirit' – were ones that Underhill would later

come to reject on the grounds that they ignored the extent to which the fact of the incarnation had redeemed the body itself. Willie's retreat to 'the ordered and exquisite places unsullied by human grime, where life could be beautiful, temperate, ideal' – highlights what Underhill later saw as both the attraction and the danger of Neo-Platonic mysticism.⁴² But in *Mysticism*, the austerities of Neo-Platonism still served as a buffer against a literal reading of the sexual implications of the 'Spiritual Marriage'.

To be doubly sure, Underhill went on – in a departure from the deliberately ahistorical method which she pursued in the rest of *Mysticism* – to provide a historical context for the marriage metaphor, de-emphasising even further the sensual aspects of the 'Spiritual Marriage':

the elements of duty, constancy, irrevocableness, and loving obedience involved in the mediæval conception of the marriage tie, made it an apt image of the spiritual state in which humility, intimacy, and love were the dominant characteristics. There is really no need to seek a pathological explanation of these simple facts.⁴³

The marriage metaphor, then, was not an image of sexual union, but of divine companionship.

Underhill's analysis of the 'Spiritual Marriage' was also careful to tie marriage, not to heterosexual desire but to reproduction. In the early years of the twentieth century, the link between heterosexuality and reproduction remained primary; the second element of what Jonathan Katz calls the modern 'heterosexual mystique' – the positive celebration of sexual hedonism – was less firmly established.⁴⁴ In Underhill's account of marriage – spiritual or otherwise – reproduction, rather than desire, was the dominant concern:

just as earthly marriage is understood by the moral sense less as a satisfaction of personal desires, than as a part of the great process of life – the fusion of two powers for new purposes – so such spiritual marriage brings with it duties and obligations... The self, lifted to the divine order, is to be an agent of the divine fecundity: an energizing centre, a parent of transcendental life.⁴⁵

The point of the mystic's rapturous union with the divine was not the pleasures of that union but its (spiritual) fruits. The emphasis on 'fecundity' as the central element in marriage set itself against the emerging emphasis on *eros* in the 'heterosexual mystique'.

Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (1918) used the metaphor of the mystical 'Spiritual Marriage' to precisely the opposite effect. For Stopes, the metaphor literally sacralised heterosexual intercourse: 'the glow of half swooning rapture in which the mystic's whole being melts and floats in the light of the divine force is paralleled in the rapture of lovers'.⁴⁶ Elsewhere, Stopes's tone is clinical and impersonal ('the stimulated penis, enlarged and stiffened, is

pressed into the woman's vagina...').⁴⁷ The metaphor of mystical union to describe orgasm is the enabling context for one of the purplest passages in the book:

the half swooning sense of flux which overtakes the spirit in that eternal moment at the apex of rapture sweeps into its flaming tides the whole essence of the man and woman, and as it were, the heat of the contact vapourises their consciousness so that it fills the whole of cosmic space. For the moment they are identified with the divine thoughts, the waves of eternal force, which to the Mystic often appear in terms of golden light.⁴⁸

Although Stopes resolves this passage at the moment of conception (the lovers 'bring back with them a spark of that light which we call life'), the rest of the chapter is actually a discussion of birth control.⁴⁹ For Stopes, then, the metaphor of the 'Spiritual Marriage' was appropriate even for the celebration of non-procreative heterosexual desire.

While Underhill was unwilling to go so far, she did move towards a more positive reading of the body, in large part as a result of her 'conversion' from Neo-Platonism to a more orthodox Christianity. In *The Mystic Way* (1913), for example, she provided clear criticisms of Neo-Platonic philosophy:

the mystical philosophy of the Neoplatonists was, like that of Hinduism – to which it is in all probability indebted – fundamentally negative and sterile. It was directed to the attainment of pure Being by the total rejection of Becoming; its ideal was static absorption in an unconditioned Reality.⁵⁰

Christianity, she argued elsewhere, was the only religious tradition which offered salvation to the whole human being:

surely, the real difference which marks out Christianity from all other religions lies just here; in this robust acceptance of humanity in its wholeness, and of life in its completeness, as something which is susceptible of the Divine. It demands, and deals with, the whole man, his Titanic energies and warring instincts; not, as did the antique mysteries, separating and cultivating some supposed transcendental principle in him, to the exclusion of all else. Christians believe in a God immanent and incarnate, Who transfuses the whole of the life which He has created, and calls that life in its wholeness to union with Him.⁵¹

As she put it in the handwritten 'Rule' that she drew up for herself at Christmas 1921, 'spiritual perception without *some* sense stimulation is a psychological impossibility, there is no *exclusively* spiritual apprehension of spiritual reality. Human & historical contacts are essential to its fulness'.⁵² Neo-Platonism was a 'complete escape from the standing religious snare of anthropomorphism', but it immediately fell into the opposite trap: 'Neoplatonism also escaped from the grasp of humanity', leaving little space for the passionate intensities of devotional religion.⁵³

Devotion to a personal, incarnate Christ, on the other hand, returned Underhill to the 'religious snare of anthropomorphism', which was also the snare of sexual desire. Underhill continually returned to the dangers of a devotional spirituality focused on a 'personal God' – 'where it takes a crudely anthropomorphic form, the idea of personality may be a disadvantage; opening the way for the intrusion of disguised emotions and desires' – but (though it had not been much evident in *Mysticism*) she had long been drawn to the possibilities of this devotional practice.⁵⁴ In a 1912 letter, she criticised a lecturer whose class she had recently attended, one of those Christians whose goal, as Underhill saw it, was to create 'a healthy all-round efficient even-tempered creature, a perfect machine for doing God's Will: but not a "God-intoxicated spirit", a *lover* of the Eternal Beauty'. Underhill continued:

Miss R. said on Wednesday, à propos of the stigmata of the saints, that modern Christians would never think of meditating on the sufferings or crucifixion of Christ but would give all their attention to making the world the sort of place where 'such an episode' would be impossible. Rather a tepid, remote impersonal kind of religion, don't you think? And wholly wanting in the great qualities of wildness and romance.⁵⁵

In 1911 and 1912, Underhill had experimented with the 'wildness and romance' of devotional religiosity in one of two books she published under the pseudonym 'John Cordelier'. The first, *The Path of the Eternal Wisdom* (1911) was relatively uncontroversial; prefaced with a quotation from Proverbs which announced 'All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them' (Proverbs 8:8), it was an abstract discussion of the Stations of the Cross as moments in a larger cosmic process.⁵⁶ In *The Spiral Way* (1912), however – meditations on the events of the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary – Underhill's somatisation of religious experience echoed the accounts of mystics like Teresa. The Christian is 'nourished upon that [Mary's] breast'; with Mary she or he suckles 'the little Child of the Infinite'.⁵⁷ Meditating on the crucifixion, Underhill's identification with the suffering body of Christ produces an erotic effect: we are 'to make an oblation of our very bodies' dignity and reticence', to be 'grateful for these purifying torments'. The 'thud of the descending lash... beat[s] time to a celestial music', 'merciless hands' strip the spirit naked, the worshipper is pierced and penetrated by 'His all-demanding love', the 'fullness of Creative Energy seizes upon the finite human creature' and 'at last is consummated the Spiritual Marriage of the soul'.⁵⁸ The polymorphous perversity of devotion in *The Spiral Way* was a radical departure from Underhill's usual style, revealing the instability of the desiring body as the basis of an encounter with the divine.

Two years after the publication of *The Spiral Way*, she made a quite different effort to develop an experiential mysticism, de-emphasising raptures and ecstasies in order to normalise the mystical experience for modern readers.

Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People (1914) was aimed at the ‘average man’ and promised non-technical and unsentimental instruction in mystical practice, avoiding discussion of ‘abnormal states of consciousness’ and focusing on the sorts of experiences that ordinary people might hope to achieve. Here too, however, she emphasised the role of sensation and feeling – touching, tasting, smelling God – in the mystical experience.⁵⁹

The focus on ‘normal’ rather than ‘abnormal’ states came to be increasingly characteristic of Underhill's writing, but the emphasis on the bodily and sensual aspects of ‘normal’ spiritual experience began to disappear. Her concern was increasingly with ‘that solid wholesome spiritual population which ought to fill the streets of the City of God’, not with the spiritual heroics of the mystics.⁶⁰ In works like *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (1922), almost all of the themes which had received the most prominence in *Mysticism* were rigorously avoided:

no attention has been given to those abnormal experiences and states of consciousness, which, too often regarded as specially ‘mystical’, are now recognized by all competent students as representing the unfortunate accidents rather than the abiding substance of spirituality. Readers of these pages will find nothing about trances, ecstasies, and other rare psychic phenomena; which sometimes indicate holiness, and sometimes only disease.⁶¹

Underhill now called into question the validity of virtually all the ‘secondary phenomena’ of mysticism. ‘The emotional, even amorous relations in which many Christian ascetics believe themselves to stand to Christ or Our Lady’ were merely ‘dramatizations of the self's apprehensions and desires’: ‘just as our normal consciousness is more or less at the mercy of invasions from the unconscious region, of impulses which we fail to trace to their true origin; so too the mystical consciousness is perpetually open to invasion from the lower centres’.⁶² Underhill was theologically committed to an emphasis on the incarnation and therefore to an embodied Christianity; at the same time, she viewed the (sexual) body not just as an unreliable spiritual tool but also as an active impediment, misleading those who attempted to utilise the body as a bridge to the divine.

By the early 1920s, then, she had become convinced that the ‘greatest difficulty’ facing Christian teachers was the effort to appeal to the emotions without appealing to the sexual instinct. ‘A vigorous spiritual life’, she pointed out in *The Life of the Spirit*, ‘must give scope to the emotions. It is above all the heart rather than the mind which must be won for God’. And yet ‘the greatest care must be exercised to ensure that the appeal to the emotions is free from all possibility of appeal to latent and uncomprehended natural instincts’. The instincts ‘relating to the preservation of the race’ produced ‘the

rather feverish devotional moods and exuberant emotional expressions with which we are all familiar'. In order to avoid appealing to these 'sources of excitement' she was emphatic that 'all sentimental and many anthropomorphic religious ideas are bad for lads and girls'.⁶³

What was wanted was a 'hygiene of the soul' and to that end she began an exploration of the psychological mechanisms governing the spiritual life.⁶⁴ In some cases, she simply translated psychological terms into religious language, claiming that psychologists had provided scientific explanations of spiritual practice: 'confession' provided relief to the penitent because it was a form of 'abreacti[on]', releasing repressed emotions; prayer could work miracles because of its similarities to 'auto-suggestion'.⁶⁵ *The Life of the Spirit*, for example, opened with the blunt claim that the spiritual life was 'a matter of biology'; human beings had an 'instinct for God'.⁶⁶ Psychology was 'now teaching us to find, at all levels of our craving, dreaming, or thinking, the diverse expressions of one psychic energy'. The craving for God was simply the highest expression of that energy: 'we have no real reason to suppose breaks in the life process which extends from the infant's first craving for food and shelter to the saint's craving for the knowledge of God'.⁶⁷ This was both an expansion of Freud's concept of the libido, and the displacement of its primarily sexual component: 'our "psychic drive"...is of course the same drive whether we direct it to self-satisfaction or to God'. In effect, Underhill turned the theory of the instincts on its head, and the sexual instinct became a displacement or repression of the God-instinct. Simultaneously, Underhill emphasised the transcendental character of this biological/spiritual instinct for God:

there is something else, namely a real transcendental spark in us which, once it is awakened, can *only* be satisfied by God. It must take everything else with it, but is definitely *not* just Libido. It belongs wholly to the Eternal.⁶⁸

Very quickly, however, these psychological insights became identical with early Christian teaching: the conflict between the rational and instinctual is simply St Paul's distinction between the 'natural' and the 'spiritual' man. The 'business of religion' is to 'capture and domesticate' the whole person – impulse and desire as well as thought – for God.⁶⁹

The domestication of the 'natural man' was a conscious effort at 'sublimation': 'the first necessity of the life of the Spirit is the sublimation of the instinctive life, involving the transfer of our interest and energy to new objectives, the giving of our old vigour to new longings and new loves'.⁷⁰ But, Underhill warned once again, it was necessary to recognise that 'there are elements in religious experience which represent, not a true sublimation, but either disguised primitive cravings and ideas, or uprushes from lower instinctive levels'. Devotional activity tended to produce 'that state which

psychologists call mobility of the threshold of consciousness'.⁷¹ Here the soul was most receptive to God, but it was also most vulnerable to its 'primitive' instincts and desires.

In 1907, Underhill had claimed that 'Direct spiritual experience is the only possible basis; and if you will trust yours absolutely you are safe'.⁷² By the early 1920s, it was no longer clear that 'direct spiritual experience' provided any kind of basis for the spiritual life; it was certainly not 'absolutely safe'. Underhill had devoted over a decade to her effort to establish an objective foundation for spiritual experience in the principles of psychology. The result, however, was to erode her confidence in spiritual experience itself. Underhill herself had by this time experienced her own 'rapture', in which she believed she had literally heard the voice of God. In the short term, it provided her with an enormous sense of relief and reassurance. She was, however, immediately overwhelmed by doubt. She wrote to von Hügel – who had recently become her spiritual director – in despair:

[I have a] terrible overwhelming suspicion that after all my whole 'invisible experience' may only be subjective...I may have deceived myself right through, and, always studying these things, self-suggestion would be horribly easy. These doubts are absolute torture...They paralyse one's life at the roots, once they lodge in the mind...*how* am I to know for certain this is not just some psychic mechanism? There are times when I wish I had never heard of psychology.⁷³

In the original handwritten and much-corrected draft of the report to von Hügel, she added 'and further, there is the obvious fact that consolations & deprivations *are* somehow connected with the ups & downs of one[']s nervous & even bodily life'.⁷⁴ The body was no longer the conduit for an authentic spiritual experience, but a barrier to it.

Where direct, embodied spiritual experience had been the 'ultimate authority', Underhill now emphasised the centrality of the institutional church, which 'corrects subjectivism'.⁷⁵ The church was a 'valuable safeguard against the notorious extravagances of a mysticism unfettered by authority'.⁷⁶ In her last major work, *Worship* (1936), the emphasis on experience was replaced by a focus on ritual, liturgy and corporate institutional religious practice, completing the shift from mystical experience to the ordinary spiritual life. Underhill now stressed 'how little the Christian life of personal devotion is concerned with conscious spiritual contacts or achievements; how entirely its emphasis lies on loving subordination to God, a quiet acceptance of "the sacrament of the present moment" as a major means of grace, whatever its form'.⁷⁷ This emphasis on the 'sacramental' character of Christian spirituality, which the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* defined as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace', was elaborated in Underhill's favourite among her works, *The Golden Sequence* (1933). There

she repeated her warnings about the dangers of confusing 'psycho-sensual experience' with a mystical encounter with God, even while recognising that human life was a 'mixed life of sense and spirit', and that 'this most subtle encounter [with God-Spirit] should be evoked, expressed and enmeshed within sensible forms is a humbling necessity of our being'.⁷⁸ Underhill's formulation here denigrated even as it admitted the role of the body in spiritual experience: 'many a dubious devotion has contributed to the formation of a saint'.⁷⁹

While Underhill's emphasis on sacramentalism and the God-Spirit can be construed as a progressive theology which marked a return to some of her earlier liberal convictions, on the whole, Underhill's theological shifts from Neo-Platonism to a more orthodox Christo-centric Anglicanism tended toward a rejection of both modernism and mysticism for a more conservative and institutional Christianity.⁸⁰ By the early 1930s, Underhill had become convinced that psychology and Christianity were fundamentally incompatible: 'the more I see of the "psychological point of view" the more I feel its distance from the Christian point of view!'⁸¹ Her commitment to the corporate body of the church (which was, in both its Catholic and Anglican forms, a highly conservative body) put her in conflict with liberal churchwomen. She rejected, for example, the ordination of women on the grounds that it represented too complete a break with the Catholic tradition.⁸²

By identifying an eroticised mysticism as in some sense deviant, psychologists posed new kinds of choices for those who, like Underhill, took both their religion and their psychology seriously. In Underhill's case, the effort to police the boundaries between 'normal' and 'abnormal' spiritual states repeatedly called into question the status of the body as a basis for spiritual knowledge. In the twelfth edition of *Mysticism* (1930), subtle shifts of emphasis reflected her growing commitment to spiritual 'normalcy'. Where the earlier version noted that mysticism 'is not merely the power of contemplating Eternity', in the later version, mysticism was repositioned: 'on the one hand it is not merely the power of contemplating Eternity: on the other, it is not to be identified with any kind of religious queerness'.⁸³

Underhill's complex trajectory serves as a useful reminder of the provisional nature not only of the categories we use to understand the dynamic relationships between religion, sexuality and the body but also of the larger historical narratives within which these relationships are themselves understood. As historians, looking back through the modernist moment which reconfigured the spiritual as derived from or a displacement of the sexual, it is exceedingly difficult for us to perceive other ways of thinking about these relationships. At the same time, this account does not map easily onto larger accounts of 'secularisation' or of a shift from 'pre-modern' to 'modern' understandings of spirituality. As Orsi notes, we need to be wary of over-emphasising linear movement, recognising that different ways of experiencing

devotion ‘exist together and inflect each other, today as in the Middle Ages... It is not a question of pre-modern, modern and postmodern, but of different ways of being in the world at the same time’.⁸⁴ In Underhill's multiple and shifting identifications with (and efforts to distance herself from) both ‘modern’ psychology and Christian ‘tradition’, we can trace the historical contingencies which have shaped and reshaped the experience of devotion in early twentieth-century Britain, and which have had lasting legacies in contemporary Christian attitudes to sexuality and the body.

Notes

My thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial support of the early stages of this research.

- 1 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (4th edn, London: Methuen & Co., 1912), p. 107. The work was originally published in 1911; a 3rd edition, slightly revised, was published in January 1912. More substantive revisions were made for a 12th edition in 1930. References are to the 4th edition unless otherwise noted.
- 2 Arthur Symons, ‘The Poetry of Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz’, *Contemporary Review* 75 (1899), pp. 542–51, here pp. 543, 546. Underhill added the exclamation mark, exaggerating Symons's ‘astonishment’.
- 3 Symons, ‘Poetry of Santa Teresa’, p. 546.
- 4 Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 213–22.
- 5 Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 511–12.
- 6 Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (2nd impression, London: James Clark & Co., 1925), pp. 183, 185.
- 7 Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality from 1700 to the Present Day* (London: SPCK and Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 414.
- 8 Ann Loades, ‘Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941): Mysticism and Worship’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10 (2010), pp. 57–70, here p. 62.
- 9 Jantzen herself was critical of Underhill's promotion of an ahistorical mysticism disconnected from social justice. Grace M. Jantzen, ‘The Legacy of Evelyn Underhill’, *Feminist Theology* 2/4 (1993), pp. 79–100, here p. 99.

- 10 For a full account of Underhill's life, see Dana Greene, *Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990). The chapter entitled 'The Work of the Borderland' is pp. 35–55. See also Christopher J. R. Armstrong, *Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941): An Introduction to her Life and Writings* (London and Oxford: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1975).
- 11 See Joy Dixon, 'Modernity, Heterodoxy and the Transformation of Religious Cultures', in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (eds), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 211–30.
- 12 Evelyn Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (1922; repr. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1994), p. 160.
- 13 Leigh Eric Schmidt, 'The Making of Modern "Mysticism"', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71 (June 2003), pp. 273–302, here p. 294.
- 14 Schmidt, 'Making of Modern "Mysticism"', pp. 290–91.
- 15 H. G. Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality', in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds), *The Modern History of Sexuality* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2006), pp. 157–79, here p. 175. On medieval mysticism and the creation of a 'queer religious space', see Frederick S. Roden, 'Medieval Religion, Victorian Homosexualities', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 23 (2000), pp. 115–30, here p. 128.
- 16 For a useful discussion of the different ways that dominant and dissident sexualities were affected by these changes, see Sue Morgan, 'Sex and Common-Sense: Maude Royden, Religion, and Modern Sexuality', *Journal of British Studies* 52 (2013), pp. 153–178.
- 17 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902; repr. New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 27–9.
- 18 Paul Marshall, *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 139.
- 19 Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, vol. 5: *The Ecumenical Century, 1900–1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 144–5, quoted in Annice Callahan, *Evelyn Underhill: Spirituality for Daily Living* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: University Press of America, 1997), p. 219.
- 20 Up to 1919, Underhill's primary intellectual influences were Neo-Platonism (the nineteenth-century term for the dualist metaphysics of Plotinus) and the vitalism of Henri Bergson, emphasising the evolutionary dynamism of the universe. In the 1920s, she adopted von Hügel's 'critical realism', a 'limited duality' which blurred the boundaries between the natural and

- supernatural. Johnson argues that her most innovative theological contribution came in the 1930s, when (influenced by Eastern Orthodoxy and the philosopher A. N. Whitehead), she developed a theology of the Spirit which ‘bridged immanence and transcendence’. See Todd E. Johnson, ‘Anglican Writers at Century’s End: An Evelyn Underhill Primer’, *Anglican Theological Review* 80 (1998), pp. 402–13, esp. pp. 403, 407–10.
- 21 Jeffrey J. Kripal’s chapter on Underhill, ‘Eyeing the Burning Wings: Analyzing the Mystical Experience of Love in Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism* (1911)’, in Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 33–84 is an important exception to the general neglect of this issue. Kripal’s interest is in mysticism and the erotic more generally, rather than in Underhill’s specific historical context, and he focuses almost exclusively on the earlier editions of *Mysticism*.
 - 22 For a fuller discussion of the theological implications, see Todd E. Johnson, ‘Evelyn Underhill’s Pneumatology: Origins and Implications’, *Downside Review* 116 (April 1998), pp. 109–36.
 - 23 See e.g., Margaret Cropper, *The Life of Evelyn Underhill: An Intimate Portrait of the Groundbreaking Author of Mysticism* (1958; repr. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2003). Cropper noted that ‘it is not just a brother and sister relationship’ but found it ‘puzzling’. Kindle Loc 284–300.
 - 24 See her ‘Rule – Christmas 1921’: ‘Affection for particular persons not to be directly checked, but *new* relationships only to be entered on very slowly & deliberately. Claimfulness[,] passion & jealousy to be dealt with & dropped, *not* by direct fighting but by gently turning to God or thoughts of serenely loving Saints’. King’s College, London (KCL), Underhill Collection (UC), 3/3/2, Manuscripts and Typescripts/Spiritual Development/Reports on Progress by EU, Evelyn Underhill, ‘Rule – Christmas 1921’, p. 1, handwritten MS. Thanks to King’s College London Archives for permission to cite this and other material from their collection. For von Hügel’s letter, see St Andrews University Archives, Scotland (SAU), von Hügel–Underhill Collection (vH–UC), F. von Hügel to E. Underhill, end of 1921, cited in Greene, *Evelyn Underhill*, p. 87.
 - 25 Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 160.
 - 26 See Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2010), p.

- 27 Compare, e.g., the discussion of Mary Benson and of 'Michael Field' in Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 85–108.
- 28 See Stephen Heathorn, 'E. P. Thompson, Methodism, and the "Culturalist" Approach to the Historical Study of Religion', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 10 (1998), pp. 210–26.
- 29 Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. ix, 70. On her reading in psychology, see Kripal, 'Eyeing the Burning Wings', p. 53. Freud appears to have had only a marginal influence on Underhill. See Mursell, *English Spirituality*, p. 417.
- 30 Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 319–21.
- 31 My analysis here is influenced by Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- 32 Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 95.
- 33 Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 70, 409.
- 34 Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 470–72. Underhill was quoting Teresa of Avila, *El Castillo Interior*, Moradas Sextas, cap. xi. Underhill noted that Teresa wrote of herself in the third person.
- 35 Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 356.
- 36 Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 497.
- 37 Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 350–1.
- 38 On the somatisation of piety in the pre-modern period, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 183–95.
- 39 James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.; New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925), pp. 144–5.
- 40 Underhill to M.C., [1932], in Charles Williams (ed.), *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill* (London: Religious Book Club, 1945), p. 206.
- 41 Evelyn Underhill, *The Grey World* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), pp. 286–8. Underhill's portrayal of Elsa Levi – whose Jewishness functions as a marker of both vulgarity and materialism – is one of the more overtly anti-Semitic elements in her writings.

- 42 Underhill, *Grey World*, p. 288.
- 43 Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 164.
- 44 Jonathan Ned Katz, 'The Invention of Heterosexuality', *Socialist Review* 20 (1990), pp. 7–34, here p. 17.
- 45 Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 512.
- 46 Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* (1918; 6th edn, London: A. C. Fifield, 1919), p. 77.
- 47 Stopes, *Married Love*, p. 47.
- 48 Stopes, *Married Love*, p. 77.
- 49 Stopes, *Married Love*, p. 78.
- 50 Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1913), p. 289. This characterisation of Hinduism drew on a complex Orientalist tradition. See Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- 51 Evelyn Underhill, 'The Place of Will, Intellect and Feeling in Prayer', in Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1920), p. 101.
- 52 Underhill, 'Rule – Christmas 1921', pp. 2–3.
- 53 Underhill, 'The Mysticism of Plotinus', in Underhill, *Essentials*, p. 130.
- 54 Underhill, 'The Essentials of Mysticism', in Underhill, *Essentials*, p. 3.
- 55 Evelyn Underhill to Mrs Meyrick Heath, 10 February 1912, in Williams (ed.), *Letters*, pp. 133–4.
- 56 John Cordelier [Evelyn Underhill], *The Path of the Eternal Wisdom: A Mystical Commentary on the Way of the Cross* (London: John M. Watkins, 1911).
- 57 John Cordelier [Evelyn Underhill], *The Spiral Way: Being Meditations upon the Fifteen Mysteries of the Soul's Ascent* (London: John M. Watkins, 1912), pp. 14, 45.
- 58 [Underhill], *Spiral Way*, pp. 84, 92, 112–13, 115–16.
- 59 Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*

- (1914; repr. London: J. M. Dent & Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1948), pp. xii, 96.
- 60 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, p. 165.
- 61 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, p. xvi.
- 62 Underhill, 'The Essentials of Mysticism', pp. 19–20.
- 63 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, pp. 203–4.
- 64 Underhill, 'Education of the Spirit', in Underhill, *Essentials*, p. 89.
- 65 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, pp. 85, 107.
- 66 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, pp. 1, 6.
- 67 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, pp. 2, 61.
- 68 Underhill to A. M. J., 24 January, 1935, in Williams (ed.), *Letters*, pp. 241–2.
- 69 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, pp. 62–4.
- 70 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, pp. 75–6.
- 71 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, p. 77.
- 72 Underhill to M. R. [Margaret Robinson], 9 October 1907, in Williams (ed.), *Letters*, p. 69.
- 73 SAU, vH-UC, E. Underhill to F. von Hügel, June 1923, cited in Greene, *Evelyn Underhill*, p. 85.
- 74 KCL, UC, 3/3/3, Manuscripts and Typescripts/Spiritual Development/ Reports on Progress by EU, Evelyn Underhill, 'Report June 1923', handwritten MS.
- 75 Underhill, *Life of the Spirit*, p. 125.
- 76 Underhill, 'The Mystic and the Corporate Life', in Underhill, *Essentials*, p. 37.
- 77 Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (1936; repr. Guildford: Eagle, 1991), p. 144.
- 78 Evelyn Underhill, *The Golden Sequence: A Fourfold Study of the Spiritual Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1933), pp. 129, 132–3. On *The Golden Sequence* as her favourite work, see Evelyn Underhill to Rufus Jones, 6 January 1933, in Carol Poston (ed.), *The Making of a Mystic: New and Selected Letters of Evelyn Underhill* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), p. 264.

- 79 Underhill, *Golden Sequence*, p. 43.
- 80 Johnson notes that this ‘pneumatocentric perspective...became an undercurrent in her later writing and was seldom explicit’. Johnson, ‘Anglican Writers’, pp. 409–10.
- 81 KCL, UC, Personal Correspondence, Evelyn Underhill to Mabel Merrix. 1 December 1933.
- 82 Evelyn Underhill, ‘The Ideals of the Ministry of Women’ (1932), in *Mixed Pasture: Twelve Essays and Addresses* (1933; repr. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 113.
- 83 Underhill, *Mysticism* (4th edn), p. 97; Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (1930; 12th edn, repr. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2002), p. 81.
- 84 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, pp. 50–51.

Made Flesh? Gender and Doctrine in Religious Violence in Twentieth-Century Spain

Mary Vincent

In 1947, a Swedish Protestant, Björn Hallström, undertook a clandestine journey through Spain, referred to repeatedly as ‘the land of the Inquisition’ where power was in the hands of the Jesuits.¹ A man whose explicit mission was evangelisation, he perceived ignorance as the main impediment to conversion, but superstition and official opposition – understood as the persecution of the word of God – were also significant obstacles. Spain was, readers were told, ‘the only country in Europe where the Bible is forbidden literature’. The Franco regime feared the word of God as ‘the beginning of enlightenment’, which had yet to reach Spain. Indulgences, impressions of ‘Saint Mary’s foot’, queues of well-dressed women and ‘high-ranking officers’ waiting to see a ‘miracle-working picture of Christ...lying in a glass case’ all went to show that, in Spain, in 1947, ‘we are in the depths of the Middle Ages’.²

The tropes of this, admittedly not very well informed, narrative account were those of ‘Black Spain’. References to superstition, obscurantism and intolerance served both to reveal the nature of Catholic Spain and to show the enormity of the struggle Spanish Protestants faced in spreading ‘the pure and clear word of God’. The images Hallström conjured up were, though, familiar to many more than simply Protestant evangelists. The liturgical world of Baroque Spain formed a crucial part of the imagery of Black Spain and had been used as such by a long line of artists, from Goya, though Regoyos and Verhaeren (1899) to Solana (1920) and Buñuel (1932).³ Holy Week was a crucial part of this representation, its images dominated by graphic representations of the bleeding, broken Christ.⁴ The literary and visual tropes of Black Spain are usually categorised in terms of light and dark, progress and superstition, but they also contain a theological opposition, that between the body and the word.

This opposition had been played out in violent form during the massive iconoclasm of the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39. During the conflict, an outpouring of anticlerical violence claimed the lives of 4,184 priests and seminarians and 2,365 monks and brothers.⁵ This full-scale religious violence erupted only amid the shattering conditions of civil war and was among the

most murderous ever seen in Europe.⁶ Catholicism had become a definitional cleavage in the symbiotic struggle between right and left in Spain. The violence of the Civil War demonstrated just how deep the fault line of religion went by 1936, but it was no new phenomenon. Attacks on ecclesiastical property had been a feature of anticlerical riots since the turn of the twentieth century, notably the Barcelona Tragic Week of 1909 that left convents and churches burnt throughout the city. The proclamation of a secular democratic Republic in 1931 had led to another outbreak of church burning, most dramatically in Malaga where not a single church was left unsinged. A rapid process of political mobilisation under the new Republic led to a hardening of attitudes, not least around religion, the defence of which became a badge of identity to the right. An ill-conceived socialist rising in October 1934 led to a new outbreak of anticlerical violence, which was now directed at people as well as property.⁷

Iconoclasm was an intrinsic part of these anticlerical assaults, considerably more common than murder or physical attack. During the Civil War, religious statues and buildings were singled out for attack and hidden liturgical objects – such as confessionals, relics and even disinterred bodies – were taken out of the cloister to be displayed on the street.⁸ This juxtaposition of light and dark was not simply an echo of the Reformation. It is, rather, a contention of this article that the forms of religious violence enacted in twentieth-century Spain reflected competing views of the incarnation. It is striking how, for example, anti-Catholic violence – widespread in the 1930s – was targeted against bodies, both real and unreal, people and statues, while Catholic violence against Protestants – which erupted at certain points in the 1940s and 50s – was directed against books, bibles and the written word. This must reflect devotional differences: the Protestant insistence on the primacy of scripture contrasted sharply with Catholic practice around images, which were often touched, kissed or clothed by the faithful.

There were also other differences. The anti-Catholic violence of the Civil War was widespread, affecting every area of Republican-held Spain outside the Basque Country. Its protagonists reflected the wider divisions of the war, with religion acting as a marker for the class-based divisions of left against right, poor against rich. Young, male workers, both rural and urban, were thus the principal agents of iconoclasm, both during the civil war and earlier. A recent study shows a higher participation of ‘rural middling sectors’ in 1936 than was previously assumed but confirms popular anticlericalism as largely proletarian.⁹ In contrast, the anti-Protestant violence of the 1940s occurred within the context of a victorious National-Catholic regime. The assailants were invariably educated and committed young Catholics, often from families identified with the regime. The police investigation following an attack on the Protestant chapel in Figueres in March 1948, for example, identified the culprits as ‘young members of Catholic Action, of extreme religiosity’.¹⁰

The starting point for many of the post-war attacks on Protestant chapels was the defence of the Virgin Mary. Devotion to Mary was the sharpest point of difference between Protestantism and Catholicism and the claim that Protestants ‘do not believe in the Virgin’ was heard time and time again in local anti-evangelical agitation. The actual point of attack was, though, the incarnate word in the shape of scripture. In Aguilas (Murcia), for example, on one day in 1940, ‘a group of people, communicant members of the established Church’ launched a violent assault on the local Protestant chapel, breaking down doors, defacing liturgical objects and, extraordinarily, ‘trampling, shooting, and urinating on bibles, gospels and hymn-books’.¹¹ Similarly, during an assault by Requetés on the chapel at Granollers in September 1947, the ‘heretical library’ was ‘completely destroyed’ while during the attack on the Methodist chapel in c/Ripoll, Barcelona on 11 October 1947 ‘the pulpit, organ, notice-boards, pews, doors, windows, the harmonium, piano, Bibles and hymn books were rendered quite useless. It was scandalous to see the large Bible from the pulpit torn into tiny fragments scattered on the ground’.¹²

It is clear that, in all these cases, the actions of the assailants were transgressive. These were not marginal, poor or criminal elements yet they broke laws against trespass, assault and damage to property, and offended against accepted social standards of behaviour. What is striking, however, is the religious transgression; they involve deliberate attacks on the word, including the word of God. To urinate on, or destroy, Bibles is clearly sacrilege, yet the extremes of behaviour shown in Aguilas suggest that the perpetrators felt not only a temporary immunity from social convention but also a sense that Protestantism itself was a legitimate object of attack. For, in the 1940s, the Bible was neither a feared nor, despite some evangelical claims, a banned book in Spain.¹³ What was under attack was the position the Word had in Protestant Christianity. The notion of the ‘incarnate word’ was entirely foreign to these Catholics, who retained not only a bodily understanding of God made man but also an explicitly gendered, and bifurcated, understanding of this incarnation.

Although Christian churches shared a common scripture, language and history and so chose similar tropes and images in depicting their plight during periods of attack – notably that of the early ‘martyred’ or persecuted Church – there was a continued emphasis on difference, particularly the distinguishing theologies around the position of the Virgin Mary and ideas of Biblical authority. Devotion to the Virgin was particularly important in demarking the essential difference between Protestants and Catholics, as well as the inferior position of the former. Perceived slights on the ‘honour’ of Mary could also be an occasion for anti-Protestant violence. Thus, the official account of the attack on the Brethren Hall in Linares in 1947 begins by describing how:

On June 24, about forty people entered the evangelical chapel...talking out loud and smoking...after ten minutes one of them pounded on a bench

three times, and this served as a signal for all to rise and shout ‘Long live the most holy Virgin’. Immediately they distributed themselves all over the chapel armed with clubs like those the police carry, iron rods and pistols. With these instruments, after making the sign of the cross, they broke the lights, chandelier, organ, wall clock, pulpit, bookcase and benches, and struck and wounded the defenceless and peaceful Christians...Almost all present at the service were terribly beaten.¹⁴

This account was already embellished: the local Brethren missionary, Rachel Chesterman, had originally put the number of assailants at thirty, made no mention of smoking, talking or the sign of the cross, and was clear that some, including herself, had, ‘in the Lord’s goodness’ not been hurt.¹⁵ Those who were protected were women; the protagonists were overwhelmingly male.

To those who are familiar with the religious violence of the Spanish Civil War – both much more extensive and more murderous – this may not come as a surprise, though it is interesting to see the same gendered patterns preserved in the inter-confessional violence of the 1940s. In the wake of the military coup of 18 July 1936 that ignited the Civil War, 6,492 priests and monks lost their lives, but only 296 religious sisters. These figures were established as early as 1961 and remain largely unaffected by subsequent research.¹⁶ Yet, only recently has gender been employed as an analytical framework through which we might better understand not only the disparity in the number of victims, but also the nature of the violence, much of which was appallingly cruel.¹⁷ Assaults on both religious personnel and religious images often took highly performative forms. Burlesques of processions and sacramental liturgies – including marriage – were common while statues, corpses and living bodies were assaulted, mutilated and ‘executed’.

Much of the violence had a sexual theme yet was rarely enacted by women, although they did have a much higher incidence of involvement in acts of iconoclasm than in violence against the person. They thus featured far less commonly than men in the lists of perpetrators, as well as of victims. This remains the case, even if we look at victims of sexual violence. Though sexual taunting and mockery seems to have been ubiquitous, sexual assault against nuns was rare: Father Montero’s original investigation did not find a single incidence of rape.¹⁸

In contrast, while male rape seems to have remained unthinkable, male victims were routinely subjected to sexual violence, from stripping to castration (both pre- and post-mortem). In Murcia, for example, in September 1936, several bodies were seized by a mob after an execution. That of a local parish priest was ‘horribly profaned’ and ‘shamefully mutilated’ before being dragged around the city and hoisted onto the bell tower of his own church.¹⁹ In nearby Almería, a priest’s body was found, burnt, battered and castrated while, in Valencia, a priest who refused to ‘marry’ – invariably a euphemism

for having sex – was castrated before being shot, while sexual taunting and humiliation appears to have been ubiquitous.²⁰ Priests – the primary targets of the anticlerical assailants of the Civil War – were thus attacked as men even though they were singled out on account of their office. Clerical masculinity represented the power of the Church while their celibacy represented an affront to how Spanish men were supposed to live their lives. Hence the anticlerical concern with confession, given the priests' abilities to pry into the sexual and domestic concerns of other men, simply by hearing their wives' confessions.²¹

There are other clear social and cultural factors that served to protect women religious, while singling out their male counterparts for attack. The nuns could themselves be the victims of the 'seductions' of the priest, enticed into their convents by the blandishments of an imaginary God and his all too human representative. Female virginity was valued and respected in 1930s Spain, unlike male virginity, which was often viewed with contempt, particularly in popular culture. Crucially, perhaps, single women required protection: the 'brides of Christ' belonged to no man. It is, however, a contention of this article that this differential treatment meted out both to and by men and women reflects not only the gendered structures of Spanish society but also those of Catholic doctrine. The masculinity of the priests represented the fact of the incarnation, that defining moment in Christianity when God took human form. The idea of God made flesh, and the consequent embodiment of the divine in the person of Jesus Christ, not only distinguishes the Christian religion from other monotheistic faiths but also makes gender fundamental to both doctrinal and historical understandings of Christianity. Yet, despite being the central doctrine of Christianity, the incarnation has received surprisingly little attention from historians, even though Catholic tradition from the Counter-Reformation continued to stress the bodily reality of the incarnation and the physical – and gendered – presence of Jesus and Mary in response to Protestantism's new emphasis on God as Word.

Nowhere did this Counter-Reformation insistence on the bodily reality of the incarnate God have a greater representational effect than in the Baroque Catholicism of southern Europe, particularly Spain. The Christological emphasis of the Reformation led to a flourishing of both devotions and representations centred on the Passion throughout Catholic Europe, from Germany to Portugal.²² The translation – originally by the Franciscans – of this Christological emphasis into the annual recreation of the Passion as the object of devotion on the streets of Spain every Holy Week not only ensured its survival but also meant that it assumed a familiarity never attained by the formal, Eucharistic liturgies of the Mass. This enactment of Christ's suffering and death – the moment of redemption and so the fulfilment and ultimate understanding of the incarnation – continued through the centuries from the Counter-Reformation into the modern period. The Holy Week tradition thus

maintained a surprisingly literal understanding of the sacrificial drama of the incarnation as outside historical time. Its immanence was attested to by its ritual recreation in the streets of Spanish cities every Passiontide.²³ That not all accepted this understanding – or even the ‘fact’ – of the incarnation was increasingly evident with the emergence of competing political and religious traditions, particularly under the Second Republic (1931–36), when many of the processions fell foul of legislation prohibiting public displays of cult.

However, the Holy Week processions maintained an artistic tradition of acute physical representation into the modern period, even as iconographic traditions changed. Forged by sculptors known as *imagineros*, the tradition of working in polychromed wood allowed a plasticity to these images that gave them a truly astonishing physicality.²⁴ The undoubted masters of these techniques worked in the seventeenth century and their statues – and the religious devotion they reflected – helped to construct the Baroque idiom that was to define Spanish Catholicism. The ‘passional culture’ of devotion to the suffering Christ was central to the tradition of the Baroque *imagineros*, whose works provided graphic anatomical illustrations of Christ's human suffering precisely as a site of contemplation and worship.²⁵ They also thereby established the suffering Christ as the receptacle of humanity, even though, in theological terms, he took his humanity from his mother.

The *Cristo yacente* of Gregorio Fernández (1576–1636) is a case in point. His images of the dead Christ, taken down from the cross – around fifteen of which were produced by his workshop – used ‘hyperreal’ techniques to convey the physical presence of the nude and suffering body with a range of materials including glass for the eyes, horn for the fingernails, and painted cork for the open wounds.²⁶ Several of these statues remain as objects of living devotion, most famously the *Cristo yacente de El Pardo*, which is now housed in a glass ‘coffin’ donated in 1940 by General Franco, whose palace was nearby.²⁷ That the incorrupt bodies of saints are customarily displayed in the same way again draws attention to the ‘reality’ of the body, even though this is made of polychromed wood rather than flesh, bone (and wax).

The hyper-reality of these images serves to establish them as *the* representation of the incarnation, testified to by the oozing, bleeding, suffering flesh. This is God made man, hence his nakedness as well as his wounds, seen not only in images of the dead Christ but also in the Ecce Homo and Christ of the Scourging – as well as its variant, Christ of the Column – and, most ubiquitously, in the crucifix. *Cristo de las llagas*, like its close counterpart, the Ecce Homo, display the wounded, suffering Christ, now naked but for a loincloth. Some of these sculptures, such as those crafted by Pedro de Mena, are clearly devotional, half-length sculptures to be seen close up and so confront the pious viewer with the ‘fact’ of Christ's whipping and the world's redemption through his blood. The image is that of vulnerability: Spain, as art historians often remind us, has no tradition of the nude; Christ's nakedness

signifies his humanity and his humility. But it is also the most familiar nude in the western world, both in and outside Spain. That it was created as such is shown by curious details such as Fernández's *Ecce Homo*, which was found to have genitals under the carved loincloth that had hidden them from view since the image was created.²⁸ The incarnation depended not only on Christ's humanity but also on his sex.

It is hard not to associate these details with the sustained assault on the male bodies of priests during the anticlerical violence of the Spanish Civil War, when clerics were routinely stripped of their soutanes and some paraded through the streets. In Cheste (Valencia), pious women (*beatas*) were invited to watch as the parish priest's clothes were torn off him, together with strips of flesh.²⁹ If these assaults were simply anticlerical – that is, an attack on the institutional power of the Church – then their object was the male body of the priest. But if the violence was, as this article argues, anti-religious, then its object was the male body as representing the incarnate God. The assault on religion played out in this modern, Catholic context targeted the physical body of the priest as a representation of the incarnate God, defined as the suffering Christ. It is clearly no coincidence that statues and images were also singled out for attack in a phenomenon referred to by ecclesiastical commentators as 'the martyrdom of things'.³⁰ In this onslaught – which encompassed buildings, archives, and liturgical objects as well as images – neither popular sentiment nor artistic merit could save these statues from the flames or the axe.³¹

There is no systematic study of the iconoclasm of the Spanish Civil War and no catalogue of the architectural, artistic and devotional works that were damaged or destroyed.³² The ecclesiastical authorities – who compiled the records – stress the scale of the violence, which affected every diocese in Spain, but generally failed to itemise the objects destroyed. There is thus some anecdotal evidence suggesting that images of Christ were singled out for attack but no systematic proof. In Málaga, for example, twenty images belonging to local confraternities were destroyed: sixteen were of Christ, including a *Cristo de la columna*, and only three of the Virgin.³³ One of the Málaga images is recorded as having been burnt by the side of the river and the ritual destruction or mutilation of statues was common. Just as with the murdered priests, images could be tortured, ritually humiliated and/or paraded before they were destroyed. In Algeciras, mock processions were held with dismembered pieces of images; in Almería, a statue of St Joseph was paraded round the streets 'crowned' with a spittoon.³⁴ There are numerous cases of statues being blinded, mutilated, or even 'married', even though they could not see, move or have sex. In the city of Malaga in 1936, for example, at least two crucifixes by Pedro de Mena, including his *Cristo de la Buena Muerte*, were dismembered, one with axe blows. Another was hoisted up with rope in a mock hanging before being dragged through the streets, while Mena's *Cristo*

de la Misericordia, an image of Jesus carrying the cross, was whipped before being paraded and, finally, burnt.³⁵

Such apparently extraordinary actions owe much to the Baroque tradition of hierophany: statues that moved, wept or bled featured heavily in the local devotional traditions of southern Europe.³⁶ Holy Week images were ‘intended to be active, lifelike presences that would interact with humans and with one another’.³⁷ They did not merely represent the divine; they embodied it. The attacks on these ‘living’ images of Christ during the Civil War were both a denial of the images’ power and an affirmation of it. Their destruction proved their impotence, even though the rituals that preceded this had confirmed their reality. As Mary Douglas has pointed out, ‘the Sacred can be engraved in the minds and hearts of worshippers [and non-worshippers] in more ways than one’. Indeed, many of these ‘mutilated’ images were subsequently saved: Málaga’s *Cristo mutilado* is among the most revered of Holy Week images, while Madrid’s Christ of Miracles was the object of extraordinary devotion on Good Friday, 1939, a week after the city had fallen to Franco.³⁸

Iconoclasm is, at a very fundamental level, about coding and, specifically, recoding.³⁹ The sacred becomes profane; what is revered is treated with contempt. A material use is found for metaphysical objects: vestments and altar cloths are remade as cushions, churches are used as prisons and warehouses, pews and polychrome statues become firewood. In Hontanares (Ávila), the baptismal font was used as a cooking pot.⁴⁰ There are, however, other kinds of codings already embedded in polysemous images – or, indeed, texts – that may also be reflected in the performative act of iconoclasm. The central representation of the Christian incarnation is the crucified Christ. Although Christmas, the feast of the nativity, is the moment and celebration of the incarnation, the babe in the crib does not bear the same weight of symbolism as does the crucifix. They do, however, share the rhetoric of vulnerability. This may be why, when we look at Baroque statues of Christ crucified – whether painted, as in Diego Velázquez’s *Cristo crucificado* (1632), or sculpted, like Juan Martínez Montañés’s *Cristo de la clemencia* (1603–06) or Juan de Mesa’s *Cristo crucificado* (c.1618–20) – and examine the male nude at its centre, we see what is actually an ambiguous gendering.⁴¹ Despite the astonishing anatomical accuracy of the skeletal structure and musculature, there is a definition to the waist and a curve to the hips that gives Christ as victim a distinctly feminine outline. Hence, his vulnerability and also his beauty, both of which are, in turn, accentuated by the absence of secondary sexual characteristics. Christ is always bearded but he has no body hair, not even, in the case of Fernández’s *Ecce Homo*, on the pubis.⁴²

This highly gendered depiction, that both insisted on the masculinity of the incarnate Christ and simultaneously denied it, was so embedded in Spanish Catholic culture as to have become invisible. But, during a period of Civil War and repression, when violence was ubiquitous throughout society, these

understandings emerged in various ways, to be enacted through the popular rites of anticlerical violence. The sexual ambiguity of both Christ and the priest made their bodies – both real and unreal – the target and the site for this, highly ritualised, violence. By these same tokens, these embedded codings may also provide the key as to why women were, at least to some extent, protected from this violence, though it should be noted that female images were hardly immune from harm.

For many centuries, Mary has been thought to have a central role in the Passion, though the scriptural authority for this is slight (John 19: 26).⁴³ In Spain, the sorrowing mother is as familiar an image of Holy Week as is the suffering Christ and commonly inspires both devotion and affection, whether as Mary of Sorrows, of Anguish, of Pity or of Solitude. In marked contrast to most images of Christ, however, Mary is always fully clothed, the richness and weight of her robes drawing attention to the only parts of her body that can be seen, which are her face and her hands. Depictions of the *Angustias* or the *Piedad* did, it is true, retain a sense of the collapse of the swooning mother, common in earlier depictions of the crucifixion. But most modern representations of the sorrowing Mary show a controlled grief. Her suffering is depicted emotionally: she weeps rather than bleeds.⁴⁴ The redemption is thus achieved through the tears of the grieving Mary rather than the blood of the parturient one.

Representations of Mary, though increasingly central to post-1500 understandings of the redemption, were also increasingly likely to take unreal forms. Even in the Holy Week images – where the devotional emphasis is very much on the human suffering of a bereaved mother – the only anatomical detail of Mary that is ever revealed is her heart, which is pierced by either one or seven swords.⁴⁵ The contrast with the intense physicality of the tortured body of Christ could not be stronger. Yet, if Christ's human body was the instrument of the redemption, his mother was the making of that instrument, for Christ took his humanity from her. This is the theological understanding that lies behind the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, systematically defined by Duns Scotus (d.1308), vehemently espoused by the Jesuits, and finally promulgated as dogma by Pius IX in 1854.⁴⁶ Mary, as essential to the task of the redemption, was conceived without original sin and so was fit to bear the body of Christ. She thus escaped mortality: her body was taken into heaven before she died, as confirmed in the dogmatic definition of the assumption by Pius XII in 1950.⁴⁷ Taken together with popular traditions that insisted Jesus could refuse his mother nothing, the twentieth century saw a sharpening understanding of Mary as Co-Redeemer. She became integral to the salvation of the world through the incarnation, even as she was recreated as a divine rather than a human figure. For all the emphasis on emotional contact with Mary, the Immaculate Conception bore little relation to the young, human mother.

The doctrinal understandings of Mary that received official sanction in the Roman church from the 1850s thus made her into not only the most popular icon in the Catholic world but also an increasingly unreal presence. Iconographically, the Immaculate Conception was depicted as both a young girl and a symbol of apocalypse; seen as envisaged by God at the beginning of time, she had stars about her head, was clothed in the sun and stood on the moon (Revelation 12: 1).⁴⁸ In this guise, she travelled around the world, appearing as Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531 in the wake of the Catholic colonisers of New Spain.⁴⁹ This new apparition, the foundational myth of Catholic Mexico, transformed and translated the existing medieval cult of the Guadalupe image, situated in Extremadura, Spain.⁵⁰ The Mexican apparition legend broke the link between popular advocations of the Virgin and historical time, just as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception had already done in theological terms. In contrast to the Spanish image, which was a wooden statue discovered by a shepherd after a miraculous revelation that showed where the Virgin had been hidden from the Arab invaders, in Mexico, the Virgin revealed herself in what was presumably her chosen form. Imprinting her image on the visionary's cloak demonstrated the divine origins of both the apparition and its iconography.⁵¹ The 'image's style – the way it looks' testified to its immanence and established its atemporality.⁵²

The Spanish Guadalupe is one of Europe's black madonnas; a clothed image, only Mary's face and right hand are visible, as is the face of the Christchild. The Mexican Guadalupe is lighter skinned and identified with the indigenous population. She is the woman of the apocalypse, clothed in the sun's rays and standing on the moon, usually identified with the Immaculate Conception, occasionally with the Assumption. In many ways, the picture appears more human than her Spanish counterpart, whose heavily wrapped body and triangular shape deny any real sense of corporality.⁵³ In contrast, the Mexican image is often identified as a Virgin of the Expectation – more familiarly known in Spanish as Santa María de la O – who is shown pregnant. The pregnancy is not obvious but was signified, at least among indigenous Mexicans, by her girdle. She is thus very clearly a transitional image; human in her pregnancy, divine in herself. Her pregnancy, like her immaculate conception, was intrinsic to her definition as *Theotókos* or 'God-bearer'.⁵⁴ As in the Apocryphal *Book of James*, where the doubtful midwife, Salome, has her arm wither on contact with Mary's intact hymen, this birth denies, rather than reaffirms, her human status.⁵⁵ The newly delivered Mary – free from both pain and blood – is indeed intact, her body still sealed.

By the modern period, understandings of Mary's virginity had become less visceral than in the Apocryphal gospels. As the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception developed and was spread around the world by both the Spanish monarchy and the Society of Jesus, the eclipse of Mary's humanity became complete. The suffering Christ was now the receptacle of human feeling:

Mary was, in contrast, the symbol of conversion and divine power.

Mary Immaculate now became defined by a series of apparitions that began in Paris in 1830 and continued to transform modern Catholicism. The visions at La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858) and Fatima (1917) combined apocalyptic messages and symbols with visions of young girls. Significantly, the seers were children and adolescents, a tendency that continues in apparitions down to the present day.⁵⁶ Our Lady of Lourdes and the Virgin of Fatima – with their slender forms, white robes, and young faces – became the most familiar, everyday images of Mary in the Catholic world. But the very familiarity of the plastic statuettes produced in their millions by promoters of her cult disguised the fact that Mary Immaculate had now become an entirely unreal, spectral presence. The drama of salvation in the modern world – which depended explicitly on conversion and repentance – was revealed through a series of apparitions that demonstrated Mary's lack of humanity by emphasising her heavenly presence.

The apparitions at Fatima, and the apocalyptic 'secrets' that were revealed periodically by the seer, Lucia, marked a defining stage in this process.⁵⁷ The original vision had revealed the Russian Revolution as one of the sorrows and betrayals of the modern world and the devotion assumed a new, global, impetus during the 1940s, reworked by the logic of the Cold War. The period 1947–54 saw an unusually high level of spectacular religious phenomena, notably apparitions of the Virgin, which were taking place through western Catholic Europe at the rate of about fourteen per year, four times more than was usual between 1930 and 1975.⁵⁸ The rapid popularisation of the Fatima cult was part of this phenomenon, with many subsequent apparitions following a similar pattern of revealed 'secrets' and the reparation of an unfaithful world.⁵⁹ Indeed, at the blessing of the Pilgrim Statue, the bishop had prayed that 'wherever the statue goes, may Mary herself always accompany it'.

This 'International Pilgrim Virgin Statue' – a copy of the Fatima image blessed by the bishop of Leira – set out on a 'world tour' in 1947.⁶⁰ It passed first through Spain, and in this national context – a mere nine years after the first, and largest scale, iconoclasm of a Civil War that the victorious Franco regime viewed as a crusade – clearly reasserted the power not only of the Virgin but also of the icon. Indeed, the journey was nothing short of triumphal. In Salamanca, 'the parade of the faithful past the image was constant'; in Seville in January 1948, its rapturous reception was described as in terms of apotheosis.⁶¹ Everywhere, miracles were reported: healing miracles, conversions, and the image's constant accompanying by doves. The presence of the divine thus moved with the statue, testified to by the accompanying doves, and serving as 'a global message in a world under siege from unbelief'.⁶² Inevitably, the Fatima tour led to pastoral letters on Marian devotion in almost every Spanish diocese, particularly those through which

the image passed. In Seville, Cardinal Segura preached a sermon explaining how she had destroyed ‘the new, seven-headed hydra that threatens civilisation’.⁶³ Small wonder, perhaps, that visits of the Fatima image were associated in some places with attacks on Protestant chapels and the destruction of hymnals and bibles – the incarnate Word – as an assault on those ‘who do not believe in the Virgin’.⁶⁴

In these incidents of inter-confessional violence – descriptions of which began this article – the power of the Word was juxtaposed with the power of the Virgin. One was scriptural, the other miraculous: though both were transformative, at least to believers. Both also depended on particular understandings of the incarnation even as they rejected – or at least reworked – its original sense as God made flesh, the Christ embodied in a suffering, male body. In contrast, the largely intra-confessional violence of the 1930s – carried out by unbelieving but usually baptised Catholics against the clergy and images of their church – targeted the incarnate God through visceral attacks on the male body of the priest. It is striking that, during the religious violence of the 1940s, the physical understandings of the incarnation as located in and played out on Christ's human body were lost. But, despite the bloodletting of the previous decade, religious violence continued in Spain, albeit in a new guise. These new forms, however – with their juxtaposition of the Protestant Word and the Catholic Virgin – still revealed competing – and deeply gendered – understandings of Christian narratives of salvation.

Notes

My research on Spanish Protestants was funded by Spain's Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación as part of the project ‘Imaginarios nacionalistas e identidad nacional española en el s.XX’, HAR2008–06252-C02–02.

- 1 Björn Hallström, *Secret Journey Through Spain* (Redhill: Lutterworth, 1948), pp. 21–2.
- 2 Hallström, *Secret Journey Through Spain*, pp. 32, 35, 43–4, here p. 44; from the ‘glass case’, it is clear that this is a *Cristo yacente*, discussed below.
- 3 Emile Verhaeren and Darío Regoyos, *España Negra* (Barcelona: Pedro Ortega, 1899); José Gutiérrez-Solana, *La España Negra* (Madrid: G. Hernández y Galo Saénz, 1920); Luis Buñuel, *Terre sans Pain* (France: Ramón Acín, 1933). See also Mary Vincent, *Spain 1833–2002: People and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 82–5.
- 4 E.g., in the photographic work of José Ortiz Echagüe: *España Mística* (Madrid: private publication, 1943); Francisco Ontañón: *Los días iluminados: La Semana Santa en Andalucía*, text by Alfonso Grosso (Lumen: Barcelona, 1965); Cristina García Rodero: *España Oculta*

(Barcelona: Lunwerg, 1988).

- 5 Antonio Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España 1936–1939* (Madrid: BAC, 1961). For minor revisions to Montero's data, see Vicente Cárcel Ortí, *La persecución religiosa en España durante la Segunda República* (Madrid: Rialp 1990), pp. 234–46.
- 6 At least 2,000 and possibly up to 3,000 priests were killed in the French revolutionary Terrors; in Russia an estimated 8,000 church personnel were killed during the 1922 dechristianisation campaign. Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780–1804* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 181–3, 187–8; Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (London: Pimlico, 1996), pp. 745–51.
- 7 José Alvarez Junco, 'El anticlericalismo en el movimiento obrero', in Germán Ojeda (ed.), *Octubre 1934: Cincuenta años para la reflexión* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1985), pp. 283–300.
- 8 See Bruce Lincoln, 'Revolutionary Exhumations in Spain, July 1936', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27 (1985), pp. 241–60.
- 9 Maria Thomas, *The Faith and the Fury: Popular Anticlerical Violence and Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931–1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), pp. 74–120.
- 10 Josep Clara, 'Represión, intolerancia y consolidación de los protestantes catalanes en la postguerra: El ejemplo de Girona', *Anales de Historia Contemporánea* 17 (2001), pp. 301–24, here p. 305.
- 11 As reconstructed by Juan Bautista Vilar, presumably from oral sources: *Un siglo de protestantismo en España: Águilas, Murcia, 1893–1979* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1979), pp. 121–2.
- 12 Both quoted *Religious Liberty in Peril: Documents Illustrating the Condition of Protestants in Spain* ('Pro-Hispania', n.p. August 1948), Angus Library, Regent's Park College Oxford, Baptist World Alliance Archives (BWA), 1C 14(B) Folder II 6.
- 13 Catholics were, in fact, encouraged to read the scriptures by Leo XIII, *Proventissimus Deus* (1893). The Vulgate was translated into Spanish in 1825, while the 1940s saw the publications of the first direct Catholic translations, the Nácar-Colunga (1944) and the Bover-Cantera (1947), both published cheaply in Madrid by Editorial Católica.
- 14 Typescript, 'Spanish Evangelical Christians Appeal to General Franco and to the Civilised World', BWA, 1C 14 (B) Folder 5. The account claimed to be by an eyewitness, though the 'chapel' was in fact the Brethren hall.

- 15 University of Manchester, John Rylands University Library, Echoes of Service Papers, correspondence: Miss Chesterman to Mr Biffen, 25 June 1948.
- 16 Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa*; some double-counting has reduced the overall figure to 6,788 from Montero's original 6,832, while the number of female religious killed has been raised from 283 to 296.
- 17 Mary Vincent, "'The Keys of the Kingdom': Religious Violence in the Spanish Civil War", in Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (eds), *The Splintering of Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 68–92; Gregorio Rodríguez Fernández, *El hábito y la cruz: Religiosas asesinadas en la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid: Edibesa, 2006); Thomas, *The Faith and the Fury*, pp. 100–21.
- 18 In fact, three nuns were raped and murdered in Peralta de la Sal (Huesca) while a further five sisters were subjected to sexual assault before being killed in Riudarenes (Girona): Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Press, 2012), pp. 236, 249–50.
- 19 Archivo Nacional Histórico, Madrid, Fondos Contemporáneos, Causa General (CG), legajo 1066, caja 1. In contrast, the body of a local right-wing politician, killed at the same time, had an ear removed.
- 20 CG, legajo 1038, caja 1, ramo 7, estado 2; Vicente Cárcel Ortí and Ramón Fita Revert, *Mártires valencianos del siglo XX* (Valencia: Edicep, 1998), p. 323.
- 21 Vincent, 'Keys of the Kingdom', pp. 78, 87; Thomas, *The Faith and the Fury*, pp. 31–4; María Pilar Salomón Chéliz, *Anticlericalismo en Aragón: Protesta popular y movilización política* (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2002), p. 101.
- 22 William A. Christian, Jr, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 181–208. For the development of this, see Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion, 1991).
- 23 Timothy Mitchell, *Passional Culture: Emotion, Religion and Society in Southern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Isidro Moreno, *Cofradías y hermandades andaluzas: Estructura, simbolismo e identidad* (Seville: Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas, 1985); Salvador Rodríguez Becerra, *Religión y fiesta: Antropología de las creencias y rituales en Andalucía* (Seville: Signatura Demos, 2000).

- 24 Xavier Bray et al., *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600–1700* (London: Yale University Press for the National Gallery, 2009), pp. 73–89, 128–69; William A. Christian, Jr, ‘Images as Beings in Early Modern Spain’, in Ronda Kasl (ed.), *Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World* (New Haven: Yale University Press for Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2009), pp. 75–99; Ángela Brachetti, *La Pasión de Cristo: Representaciones religiosas en Andalucía* (Malaga: Diputación de Málaga, 2007).
- 25 In Merback’s words, when discussing similar, painted, representations of the two thieves, the ‘rhetorical power’ of these images depends ‘on its oscillation between past and present, partaking of both but committed to neither’, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, pp. 113–21, here p. 120.
- 26 Reproduced in Bray et al., *Sacred Made Real*, pp. 164–9. This *Cristo yacente* is now in the Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid, <<http://museoescultura.mcu.es/coleccion/obrasImprescindibles/gal18.html>>. There is a larger photo at <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gregorio_Fernández,_Cristo_yacente,_1627.jpg?uselang=es>.
- 27 The image was originally donated by Philip III, <http://www.cristodelpardo.com/Capuchinos_Cristo.html>. For a larger photo, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Santisimo_Cristo_de_El_Pardo2.jpg?uselang=es>.
- 28 Bray et al., *Sacred Made Real*, pp. 130–35.
- 29 Cárcel Ortí and Fita Revert, *Mártires valencianos*, pp. 265, 265–6.
- 30 Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa*, pp. 627–55.
- 31 The bonfire in the area of Cartagena known as El Almarjal burnt for days, destroying statues by Francisco Salzillo (1707–83) and Juan Martínez Montañés (1568–1649). Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa*, p. 646.
- 32 Though see José Ramón Hernández Figueiredo, *Destrucción del patrimonio religioso en la II República 1936–9* (Madrid: BAC, 2009), pp. 245–340 on the period between 16 February and 18 July 1936; José Jiménez Guerrero, *La destrucción del patrimonio eclésiástico en la Guerra Civil: Málaga y su provincia* (Malaga: Arguval, 2011).
- 33 All these images were of the *Soledad*, one with a *Cristo yacente*, CG, legajo 1060, caja 1. The recent study by Jiménez Guerrero catalogues extensive losses of Holy Week objects, largely by value, *La destrucción del patrimonio eclésiástico*, pp. 101–12.
- 34 Joaquín Arrarás and Carlos Saénz de Tejada, *Historia de la Cruzada*

- (Madrid: Editorial Nacional, 1939–42), vol. 1, tomo 3, p. 330; CG, legajo 1164, caja 1.
- 35 Arrarás, *Historia de la Cruzada*, vol. 1, tomo 3, pp. 331–41. Beheaded images included the *Virgen de la Esperanza*.
- 36 See Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*; William A. Christian, Jr, *Moving Crucifixes in Modern Spain* (New Haven, Princeton University Press, 1992); William A. Christian, Jr, *Divine Presence in Spain and Western Europe, 1500–1960* (Budapest: CEY Press, 2012), pp. 45–96.
- 37 Christian, ‘Images as Beings’, p. 75; Easter Sunday processions in southern Spain often include an *encuentro* when an image of Mary meets her risen son. At that moment, those carrying the Virgin break into a run.
- 38 Michael Richards, “‘Presenting Arms to the Blessed Sacrament’: Civil War and Semana Santa in the City of Malaga, 1936–9’, in Ealham and Richards (eds), *Splintering of Spain*, pp. 196–222; Mary Vincent, ‘Expiation as Performative Rhetoric in National-Catholicism’, in Michael J. Braddick (ed.), *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives, Past & Present* Supplement 4 (2009), pp. 235–56.
- 39 See also, Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000); Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion, 1997).
- 40 Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución*, p. 644; for examples of religious items being reused to make clothing and stoke cooking fires, see Thomas, *The Faith and the Fury*, pp. 113–14.
- 41 Diego Velazquez's *Cristo crucificado* (1632) can be viewed at: <<http://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/galeria-on-line/galeria-on-line/obra/cristo-crucificado-1/>>.
- 42 Bray et al., *Sacred Made Real*, p. 133.
- 43 For the development of Marian cult, see Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965).
- 44 See Bray et al., *Sacred Made Real*, pp. 144–8 for *Dolorosas* by de Mena and José de Mora; Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1975), pp. 206–24; Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 243–55, esp. 243–9; Julia Kristeva, ‘Stabat Mater’, in Susan Rubin Sulieman (ed.), *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University

- Press, 1986), pp. 99–119.
- 45 Simeon's prophecy to Mary, Luke 2: 35. The seven swords refer to the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary.
- 46 *Ineffabilis Deus* available at <http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_pi09id.htm>.
- 47 Munificentissimus Deus, available at <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus_en.html>.
- 48 As painted by Velázquez: <<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/diego-velazquez-the-immaculate-conception>>.
- 49 Rubin, *Mother of God*, pp. 390–91; David Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 50 On the original cult, see Peter Linehan, 'The Beginnings of Santa María de Guadalupe and the Direction of 14th-Century Castile', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), pp. 284–304.
- 51 Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*; Patricia Barea Azcón, 'La iconografía de la Virgen de Guadalupe de México en España', *Archivo Español de Arte* 80/318 (2007), pp. 186–98.
- 52 Luisa Elena Alcalá, 'The Image and its Maker: The Problem of Authorship in Relation to Miraculous Images in Spanish America', in Kasl (ed.), *Sacred Spain*, pp. 56–8, 61–63, here p. 58.
- 53 These clothed Spanish images are usually a head and hands mounted on a frame or two crossed poles. Richard Trexler, 'Habiller et déshabiller les images: Esquisse d'une analyse', in Françoise Dunand, J.-M. Spieser and Jean Wirth (eds), *L'image et la production de sacré* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), pp. 195–231. For Castilian examples, see Antonio Cea Gutiérrez, *Religiosidad popular: Imágenes vestideras* (Zamora: Caja España, 1992), pp. 70–73.
- 54 E.g., in the Marian thought of John Henry Newman, Graef, *Mary*, pp. 112–13.
- 55 Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp. 28–33.
- 56 Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: Visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1991); Thomas Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in 19th-Century France* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1993); Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism and the Culture of Suffering in*

- France, 1840–1970* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 106–47.
- 57 Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, pp. 67–91, 190–219; Jeffrey S. Bennett, *When the Sun Danced: Myth, Miracles and Modernity in Early 20th-Century Portugal* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012).
- 58 Calculations by William A. Christian, Jr, ‘Religious Apparitions and the Cold War in Southern Europe’, *Zainak* 18 (1999), pp. 65–86, here p. 67.
- 59 E.g., Garabandel in northern Spain. See Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, pp. 124–56; Christian: ‘Religious Apparitions’, William A. Christian, ‘Holy People in Peasant Europe’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15 (1973), pp. 106–14.
- 60 David Morgan, ‘Aura and the Inversion of Marian Pilgrimage: Fatima and Her Statues’, in Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans (eds), *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 49–65. Pius XII crowned the international image in 1951.
- 61 *Ecclesia* 31 May 1947; 17 Jan. 1948.
- 62 Morgan, ‘Aura and the Inversion of Marian Pilgrimage’, pp. 57, 53; the ‘miracle of the doves’ was first observed in 1946.
- 63 *Ecclesia* 17 Jan. 1948.
- 64 As reported in several accounts, Mary Vincent, ‘Ungodly Subjects: Protestants in National-Catholic Spain, 1936–53’, forthcoming.

PART IV

Gender, Religion and Political Activity

Conversion Trouble: The Alawis of Hadhramawt, Empire, Gender and the Problem of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century South India

Wilson Chacko Jacob

It is true that gender and religion have always been interrelated; also true is the fact that the relationship as such did not exist until around the nineteenth century. This formulation is neither a paradox nor a historical puzzle given the outpouring of genealogical analyses of such discursive formations in the wake of Michel Foucault's interventions over three decades ago. The organising power and analytical value of what were once regarded as merely descriptive terms are now self-evident to many scholars. That an epistemological rupture, or, less radically, a shift in 'the order of things', occurred between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries is accepted as truth, no matter one's view of the relationship between knowledge, power and the human.¹

Some of the silences generated by that historical truth, particularly the common presupposition of a liberal political order and sovereign subject, have been productively engaged by scholars working on the intersection of gender, sexuality and race in the context of empire or gender, religion and politics in postcolonial times.² In short, these studies conclude that the power of discursive categories and biopolitical apparatuses are historically *and* geographically variable such that attending to older conceptions of political hegemony and economic dominance is still necessary to establish the specificity of their operations in particular places as well as their limits.³

In this study, I examine a problematic very central to the rise of modern states and the liberal regime of rights: sovereignty. The question of sovereignty, rarely considered in histories of colonial contexts except in terms of anti-colonial nationalism, has tremendous importance to the geographically differentiated formations of gender and religion that were produced in the nineteenth century. However, rather than argue that European imperialism and colonial rule brought new political notions to the rest of the world, the story of the Muslim Hadhrami Alawis in India examined below reveals a far more complex and interrelated process of delimiting the terms of a new global dispensation centred around sovereignty. In order to avoid confusing this with claims of authenticity, the argument is as follows. First, the historical narrative of the Alawis in South India during the British conquest of and

consolidation of power in Malabar illustrates an encounter between two ostensibly divergent conceptions of sovereignty. Second, in that putative divergence was located a politics of gender and the constitution of religion as a separate sphere, with major implications for communal and individual identities. Third, that moment of encounter in which the political and religious were transformed, or emerged in terms of an aspiring colonial state, also witnessed gender's appearance anew as a discursive formation of power. In short, the article provides a view onto one theatre staging the global performance of gender's reconstitution through unprecedented battles over sovereign domains (territorial, spiritual, legal and political) waged in the nineteenth century, which in turn generated a new vocabulary of rights linked to reconfigured religious and secular identities.

Sovereignty's global history

Historians have traditionally studied sovereignty as a problem of state, which began to be resolved towards the middle of the seventeenth century with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the dawning of a system resembling an 'international' order. Even though this was largely a European affair (and has been most often theorised within those geographical limits), the borders of Europe were still grey in this period, particularly in relation to the Ottoman and Russian Empires. More recently, scholars have shown that the early modern phenomenon of state formation encompassed much of the Eurasian landmass and the British and Japanese isles. The study of the problem of sovereignty was further complicated with Foucault's investigations into 'governmentality', which he concluded was the real solution to the ancient and cyclical story of kings and kingdoms. The state was in this view an effect of the myriad of specific techniques and discourses centred on the concept of 'population' that proliferated by the eighteenth century. In other words, it was only as territorial sovereignty became less of a problem (in western Europe) that the permanence of state could be secured and through productive performances of power rendered the new locus of human belief and aspirations – that is, the condition of possibility for modern, secular subject formation.

Accepting the traditional or Foucaultian approach to sovereignty as a global explanation is problematic for several reasons.⁴ What concerns us here is the treatment of 'religion' therein as a receding phenomenon or discourse in the face of secular advances, which makes explaining events such as the Iranian revolution in 1979 or the rise of various kinds of religious fundamentalism since the late 1960s difficult.⁵ Even accepting Foucault's genealogical insight that renders 'religion' the product of the very self-same processes that were to have banished religious terms and practices to inner domains or far corners, one is confronted with the conclusion that 'it' nonetheless became a barred discourse in modernity.⁶

Without rejecting outright the historical accounts of the state system or Foucault's findings about governmentality, it is possible to open up the Europe-centred narrative to a global history of sovereignty through an examination of gender and religion as interrelated discursive formations that took shape in and against the new liberal imperialism of the nineteenth century.⁷ Perhaps one of the less striking discoveries is that sovereignty as invested in the state remained a fraught concept for much of the century, even as states and empires expanded their purview through the increasingly effective regulation of populations and disciplining of individuals; conversely, and perhaps more striking, at the same time, religion emerged as a self-consciously distinct discursive formation partially through the defence of women's rights.⁸

That gender is a regulatory and disciplinary discourse has been well established. Even the space of empire as central to the emergence of bourgeois conceptions of masculinity and femininity has been demonstrated in a variety of historical contexts.⁹ However, the ways in which gender, religion and empire were connected to sovereignty are less clear. The historical trajectories of the father-son duo Sayyid Alawi and Sayyid Fadl illustrate this point well.

Global expansions, gender and religion

Around the same time that the fledgling monarchies on the western edge of Eurasia were spreading outwards into the world, undertaking new projects of exploration and conquest departing from the pre-existing patterns of exchange among and between far-flung peoples, what was to become the Sufi pathway of the Alawis saw its members spreading from the region of the Hadramawt in Yemen along the Indian Ocean littoral. Their diaspora would come to span a vast area from the Arabian Peninsula, along the East African coast, and into South and South-East Asia. Engseng Ho has brilliantly mapped the remarkable parallels and disjunctures in world historical and political-theological terms between this expansion of a society based on a book and a prophetic genealogical tradition, and that of the merchant colonial states.¹⁰ However, despite the importance of genealogy to the formation of the Alawi order and to the possibilities (un)available to its members when negotiating the new exigencies of sovereign power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the role of gender has been largely overlooked.

When gender is treated, it is in a predictable way that presupposes a historical constancy conceptually and located in relation to marriage and kinship, even as those patterns themselves might be said to change over time. Marriage practices allowing male members to take foreign wives were of course essential to the reproduction of the Alawi order across transoceanic domains, as Ho has shown. While the anthropological treatment of gender makes

possible a rich social historical accounting of this diasporic society, it does not show how gender itself was conceptualised or discursively effective and variable, thus making it difficult to parse the connections among gender, religion and sovereignty in the time of colonial modernity.¹¹

Although it is impossible to generalise about ‘Sufism and gender’ throughout time, the case of the Alawis demonstrates at the very least that the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad's life so central to Sufi discourses could become a resource to be deployed in specific historical situations that may very well materialise gender as an object.¹² Of course, the traditions of the Prophet's life and his revelations from God written down in the Quran constitute fundamental sources for the laws that would eventually regulate gender relations, and the reinterpretations of those sources now form a significant site of contestation among Muslim men and women.¹³ As the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran evinces, from its revolutionary foundation to the present, the very nature of state is often at stake.¹⁴ That question of the state and the concomitant problem of sovereignty, however, are not ancient, and it is here that a somewhat detailed recounting of a portion of the Alawi history of expansion, specifically involving the family of Sayyid Alawi, would be instructive.

One of the ‘authorising’ truths of the Alawi sayyids as spiritual guides and political figures is their documented genealogical claim of descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and the sons she had with Ali her husband; Hasan and Husayn.¹⁵ Their collective historical imagination, as Ho has persuasively shown, was linked to a series of migrations, going back to the Prophet's original *hijra* (622 CE) from Mecca to Medina, which marked the beginning of the Islamic calendar or year one of a new movement. Another foundational migration for the Alawis was the arrival in the Hadramawt from Basra of Ahmad bin ‘Isa, who established the new sayyid centre in Tarim in the tenth century. The figure who put the Alawis in position for the leap across the ocean was Abu Bakr al-‘Aydarus, ‘the Adeni’; he was a migrant from Tarim who died in Aden in 1508. This pattern of travel to another place, death, burial and the ensuing sacralisation of the gravesite ‘gave representational shape to [a diaspora]’ that spread from southern Arabia across the Indian Ocean.¹⁶

So by the time that Sayyid Alawi made his journey from Yemen to South India in the second half of the eighteenth century, this particular Sufi pathway had long established itself as a recognisable society with carefully fashioned markers of religious, political and cultural distinction. Indeed, when Sayyid Alawi reached the Malabar Coast of what is today the state of Kerala, other Alawis who had preceded him by many years, some of whom were close relations, received him.¹⁷ His arrival in India at this time complicates the old narrative of displacement and demise of the Arab networks that ostensibly followed the expansion of the Portuguese and Dutch and then French and

English through the trading worlds of the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁸ Indeed just as a new economic logic and technical advancements were preparing to bring about a wholesale shift in the way things had always been done (that is, produced and exchanged) – something mercantilist incursions into Asian markets did not fully achieve – the Alawi diaspora was reaching its maturity as a social and political formation.

One sign of that maturity could be seen in Sayyid Alawi's move from the coastal town of Calicut into the interior of Malabar, where he established a mosque and attracted a community centred around the small village of Mampuram. His fame as a man of special spiritual gifts and noble genealogy spread quickly, attracting followers including converts from other parts of Malabar. One of the stories of conversion that is remembered by Mappilas and recorded as part of the colonial investigations into the family of Sayyid Alawi is most intriguing. First, a cursory examination of the macro-political context is necessary to make sense of the story.

Resisting feudal futures

Sayyid Alawi, considered the patron saint of Mampuram today, arrived in the fabled trading city of Calicut around 1766. This was a time of shifting fortunes for the fabled seat of the prosperous Samudri Rajas (Lords of the Sea), the Zamorins. The vicissitudes of transoceanic trade and the relatively successful state-building projects to the north and south of Calicut lessened the fortunes of the latter in the last half of the century with the rise of competing ports and the increasingly restricted access to its own hinterlands.¹⁹ That change of fortune and lessened enthusiasm among Calicut's Hindu rulers for their historic courting of Arab merchants might be another reason why Sayyid Alawi moved his family into the interior. He settled his people along the Kadalundi River, established the first mosque, and as mentioned, quickly attracted converts and a following of Mappilas (Muslims) from areas even further afield. Mampuram was the birthplace and in a sense the site of Sayyid Fadl's patrimony – material and spiritual.²⁰ The hagiographies of his father written in Malayalam attest to the miraculous powers that he possessed and passed on to his son; while the colonial record attests to the efforts of Fadl and his heirs to regain their lands and other property in Malabar after they were exiled in 1852.²¹

The migration to the interior, however, only forced these Alawis to confront another aspect of the economic transformation afoot at the time in much of the world; as trade balances shifted permanently in favour of a north-western Europe poised for the industrial revolution, other regions saw the rise of new feudalisms.²² The expansion of the Mysore and Travancore rajas was in part predicated on novel fiscal regimes introduced when the states they sought to build became players in long-distance trade beyond the level of customs

enforcers.²³ As a result of interventions at the level of local production, feudal-like relations in land were established across the south west. Malabar, in particular, had been a region of independent small farmers and larger households, which had made their own decisions about what to sow and what to sell, viewing their land as private property *avant la lettre*.²⁴ These were now subordinated to a new dispensation characterised by an onerous system of taxation, the implementation of which put private property in land more firmly in the hands of the largest owners – princes, Nair military chiefs and Brahmins – even as nascent centralised states were taking shape.²⁵

It was into this context of shifting relations of property and rule that the British East India Company inserted itself in 1792, restoring and re-entrenching the position of Hindu elites over and against the Muslims.²⁶ The latter's numbers had increased in Malabar coincident with the rising rates of dispossession of farmers from the subaltern ranks coupled with expectations of a new social and political order that grew up in the preceding decades. The invasions of Malabar between 1766 and 1790 by Hayder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan had seemingly privileged Muslims, particularly in the last several years.²⁷ At the very least, the state projects surrounding and imposing on Malabar created a space however unstable for a re-negotiation of the prior terms of authority and control over resources. Perhaps the sudden reversal again in the balance of power in a time of rising expectations explains the ferocity, frequency and duration (over a century) of 'Moplah outrages' and 'outbreaks' that ensued upon British annexation of the region and the supposed restitution of *janmi* rights to property.²⁸

Unable to grasp, or wilfully denying, that a genuine political mobilisation of Muslims was taking place, British officials on the ground identified all of the various uprisings as the product of one force, fanaticism.²⁹ No matter the statement of leaders explicitly declaring their dissatisfaction with the current political dispensation, particularly in terms of property regime, their own explanations for rising up were dismissed as unintelligible in light of the real underlying motive for their actions: fanatic adherence to a barbaric interpretation of Islam.³⁰ The motivations, ironically, were deemed individualistic; that is, claims of collective solidarity were merely rhetorical masks for hatred and savagery since what the insurgent really sought was martyrdom, thereby securing for him entrance to paradise.³¹ Nonetheless, the political importance of Sayyid Alawi and Fadl, whether as instigators of 'fanaticism' or serious contenders for sovereign power in Malabar, unwittingly made its way into the colonial record.

Immodest proposals: sovereignty, women's rights and the problem of conversion

The local political tensions were further heightened by a difference between

Hindu and Muslim traditions surrounding women's dress and in some sense rights.³² The controversy surrounds a custom among Hindus requiring lower-caste women to appear topless before upper castes as part of a complex set of rituals related to maintaining social distinctions but also linked to property, marriage rights and kinship ties.³³ When conversions to Islam did occur, as they seemed to in significant numbers at the turn of the century and after, one of the rights accrued by these women was the right to cover their bodies and, at least theoretically, access to a more egalitarian order. The specific case, discussed below, appears in the colonial record as one incident in a series of what were termed 'outrages' for which the dominant explanation remained fanaticism, at least through the mid-nineteenth century.

Although various forms of opposition to the British incursions into Malabar occurred from the very beginning of the contest for the area in the 1760s, colonial officials defined a discrete period of unrest, riots and uprisings beginning in 1836 and dubbed them collectively 'the Moplah Outrages'.³⁴ The correspondence on the matter throughout 1859 was later published under that title and helped give shape to the idea of a dangerous trans-regional Islamic 'bigotry' spawned in Arabia.³⁵ Accordingly, T. L. Strange, in his influential report as Special Commissioner investigating the incidents, characterised the case of the women forced to convert back to Hinduism and expose their upper bodies as a 'case of the purest fanaticism' and linked it to Sayyid Alawi's preaching.³⁶

The details are sparse, but more revealing for our purposes is how the evidence of fanatical outrage is organised. In Strange's report, the case in question appears as number ten of thirty-one 'events' beginning with the knifing of four Hindus resulting in one death on 26 November 1836. Only sixteen of the events were deemed proper outrages, wherein fanaticism and violence were joined, resulting in terror and murder.³⁷ The thirty-one events were first summarised, similar to number ten below; then, they were categorised according to various criteria (location, number of attackers, number killed, intent, results and so on); finally, each of the outrages and potential outrages were examined in detail for causes.

X. On the 19th October 1843, one Koonancherry Aly Attan and six others, killed one Kaprat Krishna Pannikar, took post in the house of another individual, and were put an end to by a party of Military and Police on the 24th idem.³⁸

He goes on to offer a fairly extensive discussion of outrage number ten, but the question of gender and rights is entirely downplayed and explicitly so.

Strange points out from the start that there was a controversy prior to the murder, which involved twenty-six 'leading Moplahs' lodging what seems to have been a formal petition (given there was an official inquiry) against Kaprat Pannikar in which he was accused of violating the rights of two lower-

caste women and their four children. The women worked on his land. He was said to have refused to acknowledge their conversion to Islam and forced them to remove their 'Moplah garments'; moreover, the accusers charged him with intimidating and physically assaulting the women. Strange immediately dismisses the accusations declaring that the 'evidence was clearly concocted' on the grounds that there could not have been a Muslim witness to such attacks. In other words, if the women had been mistreated, he assumed, the Hindu landlord would never have done so in the presence of Muslims.

He quickly glosses over the formal inquiry conducted by a Muslim and Hindu official and the Magistrate H. V. Connolly's removal of Pannikar from his post as *adhi kari* (village head) in order to support his assumption that any disturbance to the order as it was could only be the fault of Muslims and their hatred of Hindus. The thin veil of objectivity displayed while sifting through the events since 1836 falls here, revealing what Conrad Wood has pointed out was an agenda set in Madras, the southern seat of Company rule. 'He [Strange] was to bear in mind that his "grand object" should be "to secure to the Nair and Brahmin population the most ample protection and safety possible against the effect of Moplah fanaticism"'.³⁹ Scholars have carefully dissected the byzantine politics of bringing Malabar under East India Company rule, going as far as to reveal the conceptual refiguring of the terrain and the character of its major players along colonial lines.⁴⁰ However, the possibility of other conceptual grids on which the nineteenth-century changes to power relations were mapped has been little studied in their own right.⁴¹

It is this possibility that the case of conversion and re-conversion might open up if viewed through the lens of gender and the two women's stories – albeit impossible to know in full – are pried from the clutches of the colonial records that privileged the narrative of Mappila 'outrages'. This does not mean turning to the Mappila version of things in order to provide the subaltern perspective or the indigenous voice.⁴² Rather, since our objectives are slightly less modest, it requires trying to tease out from the records of Alawi expansions and of British rule the ways in which religion and politics were mediated by gender, which in turn produced a new conception of all three as the question of sovereignty was worked out in the new context of liberal empire and its government of men.⁴³

The two *tiyya* women who converted to Islam then seemingly apostatised under duress along with their children, are lost to history. Stories have nonetheless been spun around their subjecthood whether the subjection was to class, caste, religion, gender or state. It is in the government's efforts to subject the population of Malabar to a relatively new dispensation that brings to light the case of the two women, Strange's event number ten.⁴⁴ Indeed, the colonial state's process of becoming such is thoroughly entangled with the terms chosen, and *not* chosen, to inscribe these women into the official record.⁴⁵

Terms that were explicitly refused in this case included truth, justice, and equality as they might relate to the rights of women.⁴⁶ Despite Mappila insistence that these were indeed the appropriate terms through which to decide the case and that ‘the cause justified the deed’, for Strange and his superiors, who sought to establish colonial rule as the new dispensation, those very same terms appeared differently. To the extent that there were any virtues or rights that existed beyond the personal private sphere, they were to be solely determined by the party responsible for public order – a distinction Strange used to distinguish outrage from ordinary crime.⁴⁷ In this context, gender and religion emerge as new discourses forming subjects who were ambivalently located in relation to the emerging political sovereignty that was centred on the idea of state and effected through new governmental techniques.

The self-conscious Mappila tradition recounts the conversion episode differently. First, the converts do not seem to have been related, they are simply noted as three men and three women. Their names after conversion – the ceremony was officiated by Sayyid Alawi himself – were changed to Ahmad, Husayn, Salim, Aisha, Khadija and Halima. They all hailed from the same village and worked on Pannikar's lands. As soon as he saw the women wearing the tops symbolising their conversion, he apparently flew into a rage, tore them off, and commanded all of the converts to return to their proper rite and station. When one of the women defiantly returned the next day fully clothed, he assaulted her and tore off her blouse. The offences of Pannikar against the religion and against the rights of the women to modest dress and respect sparked a communal outrage, which resulted in his murder.

Interestingly, before rehearsing the details above, the official Mappila record in Malayalam as far as there can be one, is careful to indicate that though forming part of Muslim collective memory, these were only the immediate circumstances of Pannikar's murder. The real cause of this instance of protest, one among many, was deep levels of social inequality, particularly in relation to land tenure – the same explanation colonial officials had arrived at while still desperately ‘seeking’ the roots of Mappila unhappiness and unrest at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

The memory of Sayyid Alawi is preserved and carefully managed by the Mappila community in Kerala. What interests us here is how that memory aligns with the colonial archive and hence reflects a modernist bias that obscures the historicity of the moment at which the community as such was materialised. The figure of Sayyid Alawi served communal purposes, indeed helped forge an identity, but the life lived by that person should not be reduced to historical determinations, if our aim is to recuperate another conceptual grid of gender and religion. Indeed the clue to read the form-of-life inhabited by Sayyid Alawi as greater than particularistic communal happenings, especially occurrences of violence, is given in the efforts of the

Mappila official narrative to shield the venerable saint from that very same everydayness of ordinary folk.

As the bearer of an Islamic prophetic tradition, both as lineal descendant and learned scholar, in a South Asian frontier space, the sayyid was a ‘stranger-king’ with strong claims of universal sovereignty.⁴⁹ If we regard the ‘Moplah outrages’ narrative, event number ten specifically, from this perspective, then we might have another view on the global emergence of the government of men as a resolution to the problem of sovereignty.

Mappila and colonial records agree that the case represented a personal affront to Sayyid Alawi. Here is Strange:

The Tears [tiyya], whose dresses are said to have been removed are described as having owed their conversion to him (which was doubtless the case), and he is represented as having taken to heart the removal of these badges of their conversion by the Pannikar, and to have roused up one of the criminals to declare that he would avenge the dishonour thus put upon the Tangel [Sayyid] and the faith. The Tangel is made to have had miraculous intimation of the accomplishment of the Pannikar's death, to the extreme relief of his soul, and throughout his interest and agency in the affair are strikingly set forth.⁵⁰

Strange goes on to suggest that all of the ‘facts’ he has learned about the case correspond to those given in the Mappila song composed in ‘celebration’ of the ‘outbreak’, and he believes the song's association of Sayyid Alawi with the case to be ‘true’. According to K. K. Mohammed Abdul Sathar, the war song ‘Cherur Pada Pattu’ and Mappila tradition hold that it was Sayyid Alawi's miraculous appearance on the scene that resulted in deaths on the British side.⁵¹ Sathar notes how improbable that was, given he was around ninety-three and died the following year, however, it is worth reflecting on the superhuman character of his ‘role’ in the history of the region.

This rare piece of primary evidence, the ‘Cherur Pada Pattu’, affords an insight into the Mappila perspective that puts the ‘outrages’ squarely in the register of war. Striking the note of war correlates with the religious opinions that Sayyid Alawi is said to have issued on questions pertaining to invasion, foreign domination and occupation of lands inhabited by Muslims.⁵² Indeed it would not be shocking to assume that Sayyid Alawi, who had arrived in Malabar in the last third of the eighteenth century at a time of war between Christian and Muslim kingdoms, continued to view his reality as *dar al-harb* [the abode of war].⁵³ The conversion controversy and subsequent violence occurring one year before his death might have been especially sensitive as the case engendered the essence of the modern struggle for sovereignty: the government of souls.

In this struggle, it was not a kingdom in the ancient territorial sense that was

at stake. Sovereignty, according to Foucault's genealogy, finds in the government of men a radical solution to the perennial problem of reproduction. Hence, it was that additional claim to power, or powerful claim, the new colonial rulers added to the mix, which sustained the conflict with the Alawis long after the wars with the kingdom of Mysore had been settled. It is fair to assume that Sayyid Alawi genuinely regarded his relationship to his flock as one of care and that he saw the Christians as pretenders. From his perspective, it was impossible for them to offer access to the same Truth and promise salvation, as that required a specific set of disciplinary knowledge and techniques they did not possess – not to mention a special noble genealogy.

Thus, gender in this case was not merely a descriptive category but a powerful vehicle for the worldly performance of Islamic universality. It appeared on the stage of history at a moment when religious discourse – hailed as religion through a juridico-scientific measure of fanaticism – was asked to take account of itself in relation to a new power, ostensibly more modern and secular. Accordingly, the conversion of lower-caste women to Islam was given a different signification in the face of a Hindu-Christian / landlord-merchant agreement on the terms of sovereign power in Malabar. The right to convert in this case could not be disentangled from a question of women's rights. Given the prior history of Brahmin and Nair men's access to lower-caste women's bodies – even if only to gaze upon them – and given the political dispensation in Malabar since 1792, it became possible for a religiously mediated gender politics to subtend acts of conversion. And for Sayyid Alawi and his heir, the question of gender was also a question of sovereignty to the extent that it was literally their God-given duty to care for and cultivate members of an Islamic society, to engage in the government of souls and to expand the domain of such government. Society is the apposite term here, since Malabar for the Alawis was only one node of a far-flung geographical network. So even as the British viewed the Mappilas as a 'community', the conceptual grid on which the Alawis located gender, religion and women's rights was far more expansive than that localising term indexed.

Conclusion

The political-theological contours of Alawi society and the conceptions of gender within it were historically shaped in ways that deeply reflected movements across space, geographical and mystical. This Sufi pathway's spiritual quest for perfection, for the Absolute, was entwined, among other things, with a universal mission to enlighten others as to the truth that would secure salvation.⁵⁴ The late eighteenth- / nineteenth-century colonial encounter in southern India between a branch of an expanding Arab Muslim society and a branch of an expanding British Christian company generated a

unique yet in no way singular engagement with the question of sovereignty that was negotiated in part via a politics of gender.⁵⁵

The changes in the early modern world that made possible such an encounter have been analysed now from numerous angles, with economic historians especially interested in explaining the reasons for the 'European miracle' or the 'great divergence'.⁵⁶ However, the conditions of asymmetry were in themselves asymmetrical, far more striated and intercalated across space than the traditional east-west dichotomies allow.⁵⁷ Correspondingly, movements of protest questing after salvation through spiritual discipline and material changes were certainly not the sole provenance of Sufis.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the particular configuration of gender, religion and empire in Malabar foregrounded women's rights in a way that was uncanny. According to conventional gender or world historical paradigms, the defender of women's rights in this context is a surprising agent and the content of the right seems dubious.

If we refuse liberal, linear and geographically bounded understandings of the passage into modernity and historicise the overly generalised notion that 'indigenous' discourses were all subordinated to, and thoroughly transformed by, colonialism, then the possibility of a gender politics in Islam that forwarded the rights of women in modern times becomes not only conceivable but deeply historical.⁵⁹ Transcending tropes of submission and oppression by treating rights as a political-theological issue in Islam does not mean overlooking the regulatory dimensions of gender as a discursive formation activated and deployed in a new historical context. In fact the former is contingent on showing the latter.

The right of women to cover their torsos, which may from the vantage point of the twenty-first century constitute an ironic end, became, in the context of a caste-based social order, a hotly contested issue. Overlaying the dynamic was a political and economic alliance of Hindu landlords and British merchants, which intensified and inflected the politics of gender with problems of sovereignty that were being negotiated at the same time. In that historic moment, Islam's representatives in the form of the Alawi society fell on the side of women's rights, while the Hindu elite staunchly opposed it, and the English company chose a position of 'willed ignorance'. Gender in turn became a forceful apparatus.

As in other contexts of gender's materialisation as a means of disciplining and regulating and consequently forming a subject, event number ten reveals more than a politics of identity. It partially illuminates a history of the gendered, sovereign subject's emergence in India. That is a history that cannot be written from the subaltern perspective for all of the reasons Spivak and others have masterfully demonstrated. Nevertheless, the problem of conversion here was coupled with the problem of sovereignty, and when regarded through the lens of gender, histories of Islam, Hinduism and colonialism appear entangled in

ways that do not presume to know the play, characters or ending before they were written.

The gender politics endorsed by Sayyid Alawi can only be appreciated as a discursively embedded phenomenon. As such, the religious tradition to which the sayyid was beholden and of which he was (according to the records, quite literally) possessed is revealed through event number ten as a transforming and transformative discourse. The conversion trouble involving the tiyya women was not exclusively a story of gender nor caste nor religion nor politics; it was a story also of ethics and sovereignty. Notions of justice, right and good were at play. Sayyid Alawi in this vein was not a representative of an orthodox Islam fixed in time or centred on the juridical; as a Sufi, he was an interpreter of and guide on the way to God. Furthermore, as a man of noble descent he was a figure of worldly authority. The form-of-life engendered here by this member of the Alawi society bespoke another sovereignty but one nonetheless that shared with the English company a notion of government that took as its object individual souls. It is through gender and its politics – activated once gender appears as an apparatus of power – that this ground of sovereignty ironically shared and contested by religious society and secular company enter history.

Notes

- 1 The main division in this regard would seem to be between a view of the human agent as sovereign (even if not necessarily self-constituting) and a view that holds that any such agency can only ever be/appreciated through its discursive formation.
- 2 On the first, there is now quite a significant body of work, which cannot all be cited here. See e.g., Ann Laura Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures', *American Ethnologist* 16 (1989), pp. 634–60; Ann Laura Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992), pp. 514–51; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 87–151. On the second, see e.g., Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 2005); Lila Abu Lughod, 'Seductions of the "Honor Crime"', *differences* 22/1 (2011), pp. 17–63.

- 3 Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?', *Journal of Women's History* 18/1 (2006), pp. 11–21. Nora Jaffary (ed.), *Gender, Race, and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).
- 4 In a seminal work, Lauren Benton tackles historical and theoretical problems of conceiving sovereignty by tracing two dimensions of it – 'the portability of subjecthood and the delegation of legal authority' – through imperial contexts, mapping what she terms 'a world of repeating fragments'. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 299. While she engages with Agamben and Schmitt at the end of the book, Foucault is noticeably absent.
- 5 Another related analytical problem arises in the context of non-state actors who exercise power over others in a delimited terrain and appear to possess sovereignty. The potential response that this is not political sovereignty merely begs the question. On this point, see the collection edited by Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). The other half of the larger project from which this article is drawn attends to a figure of the gangster (*al-futuwwa*) in early twentieth-century Egypt. When I first conceived this project, I did not know what good company I was in, 'I began by poring through accounts by and about pirates to find out whether and how even rogues might have acted as conduits of law', Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, p. xi.
- 6 For a nuanced treatment of the Iranian experience of modernist categories of thought along these lines, see Joanna de Groot, *Religion, Culture, and Politics in Iran: From the Qajars to Khomeini* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007). On the power that adheres to inner religion or ethical practices of the self, see Mahmood, *Politics*.
- 7 In a concluding chapter to a recent volume on sovereignty, Martti Koskenniemi encourages research in a similar direction. He makes the point through a critique of blindspots in each chapter, noting in particular their reduction of politics and power to the disciplinary languages of law and state. Koskenniemi, 'Conclusion: Vocabularies of Sovereignty – Powers of a Paradox', in Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (eds), *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present, and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

- 8 For another angle on this history, see Sue Morgan (ed.), *Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); on women and foreign missionary work, see part four, pp. 177–230.
- 9 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); Wilson Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). See also the following edited volumes, which offer a good sampling of the work on this subject and some of the interpretive differences that have arisen: Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire*; Clare Midgley (ed.), *Gender and Imperialism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (eds), *Domesticating Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 10 Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For world history from the perspective of another diaspora, see Sebouh Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011). For an approach that centres the Ottoman Empire in the writing of world history, see Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). The literature on early modern trading companies is vast. For our purposes, see Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
- 11 Tani Barlow, ‘Introduction: On “Colonial Modernity”’, in Tani Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Antoinette Burton, ‘Introduction: The Unfinished Business of Colonial Modernities’, in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*.
- 12 I will elaborate this point for the modern period, but for an example of how interpreting the traditions of the Prophet, specifically in marriage, served to normalise gender relations in the medieval period and reflected genealogical disputes which further reflected political and theological differences, see Denise Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of ‘A’isha Bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University

- 13 Islamic law was not static and gender relations depended as much on local cultures and power structures (in some cases more) as it did on the universalising power of religious orthodoxy. For a nuanced historical treatment, see Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Elyse Semerdjian, *Off the Straight Path: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008). See also Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Asma Barlas, *'Believing Women' in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).
- 14 Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000). See also Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); Jacqueline Stevens, *Reproducing the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- 15 Although the Arabic word 'sayyid' simply means gentleman, in this context it denotes a title accruing to lineal descendants of the Prophet.
- 16 Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, p. 14.
- 17 His uncle was the first to have arrived around 1699. Of course, the Arab and Muslim links to this region of India long pre-date the formation of the Alawi order.
- 18 Among recent revisions of the old narrative and timeline of European economic hegemony, the best known is perhaps Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Janet Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Andre Gunder Frank, *Re-Orient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
- 19 Calicut was caught between two state building projects, that of the more aggressive rulers of Mysore to the north (the best known of which were Haydar Ali [r.1761–82] and Tipu Sultan [r.1782–99]) and the Travancore

rajas to the south (Marthanda Varma [r.1729–58] and Rama Varma [r.1758–98] being the most able of them).

- 20 However, as I argue below and elsewhere, for Alawi society this was only one particular site in a more universal and multidimensional mapping of the cosmos. Wilson Chacko Jacob, 'Of Angels and Men: Sayyid Fadl b. 'Alawi and Two Moments of Sovereignty', *Arab Studies Journal*, 20/1 (2012), pp. 40–73.
- 21 Fadl was born in 1824 and died in 1901 in Istanbul. Most of his life would be spent outside India. Following the career of Fadl in the Arabian Peninsula and the Ottoman Empire is part of the book project.
- 22 I do not use this much-debated term in any technical sense here. It indexes the recognition by local inhabitants of a turn in agrarian relations toward an unrecognisable and unfair land tenure regime.
- 23 Around the same time, the Mamluk rulers of Egypt entered the trans-regional trade in grains, achieved a new level of state centralisation and encouraged feudal land tenure through the commercialisation of agriculture. See Kenneth Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants: Land, Society, and Economy in Lower Egypt, 1760–1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760–1840* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998). For a contrasting view of trade prior to the mid-eighteenth century shift, see Nelly Hanna, *Making Big Money in 1600: The Life and Times of Isma'il Abu Taqiyya* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998).
- 24 Cuno argues this was the case in Lower Egypt as well. Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants*.
- 25 Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade, 1740–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). In a nuanced and suggestive intervention, Dilip Menon takes the period from the Mysorean invasions and the eventual British conquest of Malabar to question the teleological narrative of state formation that always assumes the object and merely seeks explanations for it in the past. He coins the notion of 'state experimentation' to describe the Mappila efforts to capitalise politically on the opening created by Mysore's displacement of some of the traditional authorities. It should be noted also that in Menon's account, 'mappila' in the lower case is used, though it is unclear why since he does not provide a definition and leaves Hindu and Muslim as proper nouns. One possibility is that it indexes the lack of a fixed Muslim identity in Malabar at the time and a porous boundary between and among communities; whereby movement into mappila (an outsider position?) or nair (Hindu designation for landed non-Brahmanical caste) could be effected through one's actions

in the political and economic fields. Menon, 'Houses by the Sea: State-Formation Experiments in Malabar, 1760–1800', *Economic and Political Weekly* 34/29 (17–23 July 1999), pp. 1995–2003.

- 26 On the Bengali precedent, see Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (1963; 2nd edn, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1982).
- 27 There is good evidence that Haydar and Tipu, though Muslims in name and practice, were more concerned with establishing powerful states irrespective of religious identification. Indeed, the revolts of Mappilas in Ernad and Valluvanad (precisely the same regions the British would encounter the most resistance) in the 1780s against Tipu's oppressive government signals the massive social dislocations underway with the implementation of a Mysorean fiscal regime. For detailed accounts of that period's history, encompassing the early years of Company rule, as marked by a myriad of jurisdictions, read as 'lawlessness', see the authoritative *Malabar Manual* of William Logan (New Delhi: J. Jetley for Asian Educational Services, 1887).
- 28 *Janmi* here means Hindu upper castes, Nambudhri Brahmins and Nairs, who were thought to have a birthright (*janmam*) to land. Stephen F. Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar, 1498–1922* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 105. In 1887, Logan noted how during the founding of the Malabar Province the Commissioners' misrecognition of *janmam* as a right to land (a 'European Idea') rather than as a claim to authority over people on a land was repeated through its legal practices; he inscribed this critical moment as one of willful ignorance allowing a reading of it as an original sin for which later administrators, such as himself, would have to pay. Logan, *Malabar Manual*, pp. 491, 495–6, 506–8.
- 29 When government was more secure in its control of the area, peasant landlessness and land reform programmes would be given more serious play as explanations and possible solutions to a resurgence of 'outbreaks' in the last quarter of the nineteenth century after a period of quiet following the exile of Fadl. Of course, the reality of Hindus partaking in some of the uprisings could have also dictated the need for better, or at least additional explanations. See R. H. Hitchcock, *A History of the Malabar Rebellion, 1921* (Madras: Government Press, 1925 [reprinted with introduction by Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr, as *Peasant Revolt in Malabar* (New Delhi: Usha Publications, 1983)]). Appendix 3, 'Selected judgments dealing with phases of the rebellion', gives lists of rebels on trial, which make clear the involvement of Hindus. Hitchcock, District Superintendent of Police for Malabar, was commissioned to compile this study by the Madras Government in the wake of the 1921 revolts. As many

of the colonial reports and histories of Kerala do, it relied heavily on Logan's exhaustive *Malabar Manual*.

- 30 Menon argues convincingly that it was the militarisation of Malabar in the wake of Mysore's expansion and the 'peculiar circumstances of warfare' that created a class of 'political entrepreneurs' among Mappilas who started out as 'military labor' and gradually expanded their bailiwick to include control of lands, trade routes, and revenue streams under the leadership of *moopans* (headman, here military recruiter). Menon, 'Houses by the Sea', pp. 2000–01. However, the relationship between the Mappilas and the Arab sayyids is conspicuously absent from his analysis. He takes issue with Dale's 'overblown' *longue-durée* analysis that ultimately reduces all political actions to Islam and a Muslim identity taking shape since 1498; perhaps, in Menon's own quest for contingency and synchrony something else is lost – the historicity of the Alawi role in Malabar's politics, especially following the British conquest.
- 31 For an interesting reading of how this 'figuring' of the Mappila is absorbed into Indian nationalism, see M. T. Ansari, 'Re-figuring the Fanatic: Malabar, 1836–1922', in Shail Mayaram, M. S. S. Pandian and Ajay Skaria (eds), *Subaltern Studies XII: Muslims, Dalits, and the Fabrications of History* (Delhi: Permanent Black and Ravi Dayal, 2005), pp. 36–77.
- 32 Analysing the case requires expanding the domain of rights discourse to take in traditions beyond liberalism, which may enhance our historical and theoretical understanding of notions like freedom as always socially embedded. Mahmood demonstrates this point brilliantly in *Politics of Piety*, wherein she examines gendered ethical actions that defy power structures but make no claims of resistance and are not about the agency of a sovereign subject. In this case I use 'rights' to designate an obligation that contextually becomes a right.
- 33 There are many angles from which women's semi-nude condition might be regarded, one of which – highly dependent on higher-caste status, matrilineal ties, and landed property – would see it as an expression of their power and liberation. For why such a reading would be overly simplistic when viewed in terms of an unfolding reform discourse within the Nair community, which aligned with a Victorian moral sensibility and culminated in the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896, see Praveena Kodoth, 'Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, Sambandham, and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Malabar', *Modern Asian Studies* 35 (2001), pp. 349–84.
- 34 In some sense, the period only came to a close with the brutal suppression of the great Mappila Rebellion of 1921.

- 35 *Correspondence on Moplah Outrages in Malabar*, 2 vols (Madras: Graves, Cookson, & Co., 1863), henceforth *MOC*. The narrative of a pan-Islamic threat would take full form by the end of the nineteenth century and would feature Sayyid Fadl as an agent provocateur based in Istanbul. In some ways, the appeal to religious fanaticism as an explanation for any and all uprisings by Muslims after the 1830s follows from a long Christian tradition of demonising Islam; however, in other ways the terms of the explanation would necessarily assume new valences since the Mappilas were no longer the infidels at the gates but subjects of the Christian rulers. The exigencies of government would eventually push for better explanations (e.g., problems with land tenure) towards the end of the century even as the old notion of religious fanaticism would remain, or return as, an almost exclusively Muslim trait.
- 36 Special Commissioner's Report, in Strange to Pycroft, 25 September 1852, *MOC*, vol. 1, pp. 414, 416.
- 37 Colonial officials often commented on the nature of these attacks as being 'suicidal'. Although it is impossible to pursue here, it would be productive to think through these descriptions in light of Talal Asad's suggestive analysis in his recent lectures on the horrified liberal subject, published under the title *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 38 Strange, *MOC*, p. 401.
- 39 Conrad Wood, 'Historical Background of the Moplah Rebellion: Outbreaks, 1836–1919', *Social Scientist* 3/1 (1974), pp. 5–33, here p. 10.
- 40 Referencing Strange's report, Menon points to this new 'language of the settlement' and the implications for gender relations:

The language of the settlement is replete with references to 'rajas', and almost every [important producer] household was accorded the dignity of royalty. Some of the larger households, like the Vengayil and Kalliattu, were the beneficiaries of this search for monarchs since the settlements gave them almost absolute authority over land. At a later stage, as Arunima has shown, it became important to settle with 'male' authority within the households themselves – the earlier fluidity within matrilineal households where women could succeed to headship was brought to an end by the middle of the 19th century.

Menon, 'Houses by the Sea', p. 1999.

- 41 Rather, the trend, until recently, has been to locate the colonial in formations that came to pass as tradition. For example, in Kodoth's otherwise nuanced study of the changes affecting matrilineal relations

among the Nair, the significant engine of change is colonial, Christian, or westernised Hindus; especially relevant for our purposes is the long footnote that points to the role of Christian missionaries in politicising lower caste women's topless comportment. Kodoth, 'Courting Legitimacy', p. 349 n. 2. For a push in a new direction, see Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). For the Middle East, see Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

- 42 Indeed, 'voice' was a medium for the Mappila remembering of these events as numerous folk songs were composed in their aftermath. For a classic orientalist treatment, see F. Fawcett, 'Warsongs of the Mappilas of Malabar', *Indian Antiquary* 30 (1901), pp. 499–508, 528–37.
- 43 This one article can only be a first step in that direction. For works on liberal empire that attend to its constitutive failure, see Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press for Harvard University, 2006); Steven Pierce and Anupama Rao (eds), *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). For a view that purports to historicise that failure by way of mapping changing political thought, see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 44 On the trajectory of the Tiyyas' later political development vis-à-vis changing economic conditions, relations with upper caste Hindus, religious reform and nationalism, see Dilip M. Menon, 'Intimations of Equality: Shrines and Politics in Malabar, 1900–1924', in Peter Robb (ed.), *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 245–76. Although Menon does not mention the role of Islam, his discussion of shared rituals among Hindus across caste, specifically in relation to magic and shrines, and a move away from that common culture under the pressure of political protest and social reform movements bears traces of earlier Alawi missionary work. Interestingly, the denunciation of black magic was one of the rare instances in which the empirical reality of his Malabar connection intruded into Sayyid Fadl's Sufi writing. See Fadl, *Iḡāh al-asrār al-'alawiyya wa manāhij al-sāda al-'alawiyya* (Cairo: Matb'ā al-Ādāb wa al-Mu'ayyad,

- 45 At this level, my argument coincides with Gayatri Spivak's classic essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', which was an engaged critique, in part, of the Subaltern Studies school of Indian historiography. Spivak's critique was also levelled at the impossible universal subject of European theorisations of modernity. In the same spirit of engagement, this article marks the limit of Spivak's argument while trying to extend her insight to the Other's theorising power and historical change. Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.
- 46 There were similar conversion problems centred on women's bodies at the same time in the southernmost region of the historic Malabar Coast, which was part of the princely state of Travancore. But in this region, where direct colonial rule was not exercised, it was Christian missionaries who advocated for the right of lower-caste women converts and non-converts to cover themselves. The British Resident advising the court of the Travancore Raja tended to side with the upper castes against this push to undermine their status. Only when the situation deteriorated severely with recurring riots between October 1858 and February 1859 did Madras instruct the Resident to advise the Government of Travancore to take decisive action to make equal the right to cover. The compromise that was reached was reflected in the Royal Proclamation of 26 July 1859:

We hereby proclaim that there is no objection to Shanar women either putting on a jacket, like the Christian Shanar women, or to...their covering their bosoms in any manner whatever; but not like women of high caste.

Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr, 'The Breast-Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 5 (1968), pp. 171–87, 186–7. Influential in both revising conceptions of 'the colonial' and re-entrenching it as engine of change, Bernard Cohn folds in Hardgrave's account into his discussion of the changing meanings and politics of dress in Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 138–43.

- 47 On the ambivalences and contradictions engendered in the process of containing and eradicating illegitimate uses of violence in the context of the 'discovery of torture', see Anupama Rao, 'Problems of Violence, States of Terror: Torture in Colonial India' *Interventions* 3 (2001), pp. 186–205.
- 48 Moyin Hudawi Malayamma and Mahmood Panangangara, *Mampuram*

Thangal: Jeevitham Aathmiyyatha Poraattam [The Mampuram Sayyid: A Life of Spiritual Struggle] (Tirurangadi, Kerala: Asas Book Cell, Darul Huda Islamic Academy, 2009), pp. 357–76; the chapter includes a transcription of the war song composed after the event. Commissioned by the custodians of the Mampuram shrine, this work is intended as an official biography of Sayyid ‘Alawi and a claim on History. A foreword to the book by Malayamma states that the history of Muslims in Kerala might be divided into pre- and post-Mampuram sayyids, to the extent that, their age represented a ‘determining stage in the evolving history of the Mappilas. It was with them that a Mappila-Malabar way of life ended and a new...one began’ (p. 25). A rupture is clearly indicated, wherein the quest for a new universal existence is posited as the other side of a fragmented history. See also note 23 above.

- 49 The figure of the ‘stranger-king’ has been studied much more in the context of South-East Asia. See e.g., Marshall Sahlins, ‘The Stranger-King or, Elementary Forms of the Politics of Life’, *Indonesia and the Malay World* 36/105 (2008), pp. 177–99; Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells, “‘Strangers’ and ‘Stranger-Kings’: The Sayyid in Eighteenth-Century Maritime Southeast Asia’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40 (2009), pp. 567–91. The classic work on an analogous figure in North Africa, ostensibly operating through a renunciation of sovereign power, is Ernest Gellner's *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). On the incorporation of modalities of Sufi mystical power in the formation of Moroccan state sovereignty, see Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). I have argued the point about the nature of the stranger-king's sovereignty more thoroughly in Jacob, ‘Of Angels and Men’. The claims of sovereignty here are not in relation to being sovereign over people or territory as much as they are about being in a pastoral relation to souls and conducting them to the transcendental post-historical event of salvation. In other words the claims are about nearness to God, the one and only universal sovereign.
- 50 Strange to Pycroft, 25 September 1852, *MOC*, vol. 1, p. 416.
- 51 K. K. Mohammed Abdul Sathar, ‘History of Ba-Alawis in Kerala’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Calicut University, 1999), pp. 81–2.
- 52 That fatwa collection is titled *Al-Sayf al-battār* [The Sharpest Sword] and its authorship is contested. I treat this text more extensively in the larger manuscript under preparation.
- 53 Although recent revisions of the history of its early expansion make clear that the stark division between the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the abode of war was mostly theoretical and inoperative in practice

(diplomacy, intermarriage, trade, etc.), the confrontation at the South Asian frontier between the two expanding societies – the Alawi and the English – far from their respective homelands was initially a moment when theory and practice seemed to coincide.

- 54 It should be obvious that this is not the only way to regard the history or legacy of the Arab Hadhrami expansions in the Indian Ocean. Even for members of Alawi society, life in diaspora was not always or even primarily about religious quests. Michael Gilson, for example, tracks the history and afterlives of the Hadhrami-colonial encounter in South-East Asia through the problematic of instrumental formations of trusts, wills and other legal devices related to family wealth, inheritance and reproduction. In a sense, my research into the lives of Sayyid Alawi and Sayyid Fadl queries in the first instance what happens when there is a refusal to ‘translate’ certain kinds of knowledge (English law) or ‘crisscross’ specific boundaries (colonial rule). Michael Gilson, ‘Possessed of Documents: Hybrid Laws and Translated Texts in the Hadhrami Diaspora’, in Baudouin Dupret et al. (eds), *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 181–92. See also Michael Gilson, ‘Translating Colonial Fortunes: Dilemmas of Inheritance in Muslim and English Laws Across a Nineteenth-Century Diaspora’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 31 (2011), pp. 355–71; Michael Gilson, ‘Topics and Queries for a History of Arab Families and Inheritance in Southeast Asia: Some Preliminary Thoughts’, in Eric Tagliacozzo (ed.), *Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Islam, Movement, and the Longue Durée* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 199–234.
- 55 See e.g., Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters: Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 214–53.
- 56 This narrative often elides geographical specificity when making large economic comparisons; for example, in the Old World, the expansion and concentration of wealth from the eighteenth century onward was confined to the north-western corner of Eurasia. For a critical analysis, see Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*.
- 57 Indeed the meteoric rise of China in our present has defied much of the economic logic on which conventional histories focused on explaining the rise of the west were based. Similarly, the Arab Spring has required political scientists and historians to relegate to the rubbish bin many of their trusty old explanatory tools. For a revisionist perspective that helps situate the current economic realignment in older histories of trade and creative adaptations to new conditions, see Claude Markovits, *The Global*

World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History*, 2 vols (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

- 58 In the European context, sovereignty emerged as a contested concept due to the Protestant Reformation, as did subsequent efforts to curtail the forms of violence implied by the new inter-state system through international law. Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 59 Concerning ‘indigenous’ discourses: in the case of the Islamic tradition transmitted by the Alawis to Malabar, one faces a situation in which a discourse from elsewhere was indigenised, further questioning the binary of east as site of indigeneity that passed, and west as exporter of the new.

‘Fatherland, Religion, Family’: Exploring the History of a Slogan in Greece, 1880–1930

Effi Gazi

Even though they can develop into powerful political slogans exercising enormous influence on public opinion, attitudes and practices, catchwords and catchphrases have their own complex, even contradictory, origins and shifting meanings. In general, slogans, as a rhetorical device, have a rich history.¹ They have provided historians with topical outlines of the major concerns, frustrations and hopes of society. As ‘social symbols’, they have united, divided and even converted people. Thus, slogans have a direct link to social or individual action as well as to ‘a discursive conception of ideology’, to use Stuart Hall’s words.² Yet little attention has been given to the rhetorical and persuasive nature of slogans. The ways catchphrases and slogans establish images and identities and convey a sense of belonging is of particular importance for a deeper understanding of the politics and culture of particular epochs and contexts.

‘*Patris, Thriskeia, Oikogeneia*’ (*Πατρίς, Θρησκεία, Οικογένεια*, Fatherland, Religion, Family) is one of the most familiar and influential slogans in modern and contemporary Greece. Regularly associated with the politics and propaganda of authoritarian regimes, starting from Ioannis Metaxas’ dictatorship (1936–41) up until the Colonels’ regime (1967–74), its prior history has escaped our attention. Despite its ‘familiarity’ or perhaps because of it, there has been no scholarly research on the particularities of its formation and circulation. Hence, it links to major ideological, social and political developments in modern Greek history.

The main aim of this study is to focus on particular moments of importance for the formation, articulation, consolidation and circulation of this slogan. The analysis does not refer to *concepts as such*, that is to the various functions of ‘fatherland’, ‘religion’ or ‘family’ in Greece’s long twentieth century. Rather, it focuses on the slogan *itself*; that is it traces ideological currents, cultural practices and biopolitical discourses, as well as technologies and means of communication, which have contributed to the linkage of these concepts and to their mutual function. The multiple uses of the slogan throughout the twentieth century and its centrality for the development of conservative politics invite further investigation. Indeed, ‘*Patris, Thriskeia,*

Oikogeneia’ provided the most important ideological platform for the development of the rhetoric and propaganda of authoritarian regimes in Greece in the second half of the twentieth century while it coloured all forms of social conservatism in the country during the same period.

As a slogan, ‘Fatherland, Religion, Family’ was articulated and consolidated gradually. It emerged in an earlier period, starting around 1880 and was established in the early 1930s. The very early depictions of the slogan can be located in the context of late nineteenth-century religious collectivities. The formation of an Orthodox Christian awakening movement in Greece in the last quarter of the nineteenth century played an important role in the reworking of the concepts of religion and family. Apostolos Makrakis (1831–1905), a charismatic and controversial theologian and preacher, was the leading figure in this movement, which attempted to transform religion into a major social and political force and put it at the forefront of a mission for the reform and the renaissance of the nation.³ Makrakis addressed the Greek nation during a complex epoch, in which modernisation processes gradually changed traditional beliefs and attitudes. There were also severe socioeconomic problems due to the ‘currant crisis’ – the closing of European markets to Greece’s principal agricultural product and cash crop. Moreover, the national project of the Great Idea (Megali Idea), that is the expansion of Greece and its incorporation of the so-called ‘unredeemed’ lands and populations, which lay mainly within the domain of the Ottoman Empire, remained not only unfinished but also uncertain.⁴

Makrakis, wanting to contribute to the rebirth of the nation, regarded the reform and rebirth of the Orthodox Church as a most essential step, as the ark and instrument of the new national life. As a preacher, he was a new phenomenon in Greece. Although he confronted the official church, was condemned by the Holy Synod and excommunicated in 1878, his vigorous religious movement became a popular phenomenon that shook the religious and national establishment of his time.⁵ His main aim was to contribute to the formation of the ‘perfect man and the perfect citizen’ through his preaching as well as through education, fashioned according to his own religious curriculum.⁶ To this end, Makrakis founded the School of the Logos in Athens in 1876. However, he pushed his programme too far, especially in his critique of the country’s religious and political establishment. Gradually, even his disciples dissociated themselves from him, although they did not abandon his plan for the religious revival and salvation of the Greek nation. Makrakis’s ideas and the particular pietistic ethos which he promoted survived in a number of religious organisations and societies that played a significant role in twentieth-century Greece. Religious societies and brotherhoods, such as Anaplassis (Reform, 1886) and Patria (Ancestral Values, 1901), were set up by former disciples of Makrakis, including Michail Galanos (1862–1948). In the late nineteenth century, Konstantinos Dialismas (1855–1921) introduced a

campaign evolving around three axes: first, the critique of ‘western-style’ modernity from an Orthodox Christian perspective; second, the attack on new scientific theories, primarily Darwinism and the theories of evolution.⁷ The religiously motivated critique of Darwinism and of the theories of evolution in favour of creationism, that is the belief in a divine force which created humans and the world in its current form, was particularly intense in the second half of the nineteenth century in various countries including France, Spain and Russia.⁸ Third, Dialismas's campaign promoted the protection of the family from feminist and socialist threats.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the *Anaplassis* journal launched a major campaign against feminist ideas and specifically against the first feminist journal in Greece, the *Efimeris ton Kyrion* (*Ladies' Gazette*), which began publication in 1887. *Anaplassis* accused the feminists, including Kallirroë Parren (1861–1940), the founder of *Ladies' Gazette* and one of the leading Greek feminists at the time, of demolishing traditional religious and family values and of introducing foreign ethics into Greek society. Michail Galanos, *Anaplassis*'s editor, defined feminism as a ‘paranoid and foolish struggle...against the moral order’ while he pointed out that ‘the women's question should be solved according to religious dogma...which secure the moral, family and social elevation of females’.⁹ Feminism was a ‘foreign fashion’ and the product of ‘imitation’, according to Galanos.¹⁰

Catchphrases used extensively by religious groupings such as *Anaplassis* linked religion, that is Orthodox Christianity, with an idealised ‘traditional family’. It was in this context that the association of the family with religion became stronger. Both terms were also connected to that of fatherland. At this point, it is important to point out that catchphrases linking ‘faith’ and ‘fatherland’ had been circulating ever since the Greek Revolution against Ottoman rule in 1821, and also re-appeared in variations, such as ‘Church’ and ‘fatherland’, in the mid-nineteenth century, before the intense public debates of the late nineteenth century re-framed them.

The activities of religious organisations which focused on the critique of what was seen as western-style modernity were the primary locus for the linkage of the fatherland with religion and with the traditional, patriarchal family. In their moral discourse, an idealised ‘traditional family’ provided harmony to the entire society and constituted a model for the nation. These religious initiatives became more apparent as Greek society and politics underwent major changes.

The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by constant turbulence in both the political system and the wider ideological and cultural scene. These evolutions included the identity crisis and the reappraisals of the Great Idea stemming from the country's defeat in the Greek–Turkish War of 1897, the collapse of the currant market and the wider economic crisis, a major wave of transatlantic emmigration, increasing anti-royalist as well as anti-

parliamentarist tendencies, the diffusion of new ideas including feminism and socialism but also scientific theories such as materialism and Darwinism.¹¹ Despite its multidimensional roots and causes, this identity crisis was mostly expressed within the framework of the 'language question', that is the controversy over whether to use the vernacular or archaic Greek in education and the public domain, which acquired important political and social overtones.¹² This controversy, or rather these controversies, became diffused through the variety and multiplicity of media, particularly newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets that enjoyed mass circulation in that era. Moral panics that targeted specific individuals and groups, as well as ideas and practices, as major threats for the community, social values and culture erupted frequently in the first decades of the twentieth century.

As mentioned above, these moral panics were mostly related to a deep identity crisis while their major impetus was provided by newspapers and the technologies of the printed word. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Evangelika (Gospel Riots) of 1901 and the Oresteia (Tragedy of Oresteia Riots) of 1903 formed the arena of major reactions against the rendering of the gospel and the ancient Greek drama, respectively, into the vernacular.¹³ In the case of the Evangelika (1901), the appearance of the gospel in the vernacular, especially in the case of one particular translation by the demoticist Alexandros Pallis (1851–1935) in the newspaper *Acropolis*, generated reactions by politicians, university professors and members of the clergy and resulted in an outburst of violence which involved the killing of at least eight individuals who participated in rallies in Athens. Two years later, the staging of an ancient Greek drama in the vernacular in Athens also provoked negative responses, although this time not so tense. Hence, I argue that two major confrontations referring to educational reforms were central to the articulation and further diffusion of the slogan. The Atheika (On Atheism, 1908–11) and Marasleika (The Marasleion School, 1923–25) controversies provided the ground for major clashes within the framework of the language debate.¹⁴ In both cases, the use of the vernacular at the Higher Municipal Girls' School in Volos (in Central Greece) and at the Marasleion School in Athens respectively, together with the implementation of innovative teaching methods and courses, resulted in negative reactions. It is interesting to examine the reasons behind the reactions as well as their rhetoric.

Although recent scholarly research on the language question in Greece is of particular importance and quality, I think that we should reconsider certain aspects of it. The Atheika controversy, for instance, is normally related to the history of either the language question or of education. Yet, the very term used for the controversy – on atheism – points to the crucial role of religion in these particular events, while the huge debate they provoked about girls' education, gender, the family order and morality require us to rethink certain aspects of this episode. The major reactions against the educational methods

of the distinguished pedagogue Alexandros Delmouzos (1880–1956) at the Higher Municipal Girls' School in the city of Volos, located in the region of Thessaly in central Greece, were only partially related to the language question. They provoked a whole spectrum of criticism regarding the implementation of new pedagogical methods, and of hygiene and first-aid courses, as well as about the religious curriculum, and socialist and materialist ideas.¹⁵ Yet, what seems to have gone unnoticed in certain analyses of the controversy, is that the reaction against the educational reforms identified with Delmouzos basically focused on female figures who were involved in them, including the teachers Penelope Christakou (1878–1951), in the case of the Atheika events and Roza Imvrioti (1898–1977) in the case of the Marasleika episode. Both of these unconventional female figures of the early twentieth century became associated with the introduction and promotion of feminist ideas and practices; Imvrioti was also a Marxist. In the case of the Atheika events, it was primarily Christakou, and not Delmouzos, who attracted the hostile attention of the local church with regard to the teaching of religion. A visit by the local bishop, Germanos, and his confrontation with Christakou initiated a moral panic against the school, its teaching staff and its practices, as well as the allegedly close ties between the school and the local labour centre, thought to be a locus of Marxist ideas, socialist initiatives and atheist propaganda. According to a local newspaper, in Christakou's class 'the clergy was called a damned horde of demons while...the archbishop was presented as the devil himself'.¹⁶

Orthodox Christian believers organised protests which gradually escalated. Eventually, the cavalry was called in to defend the school and Delmouzos's house from violent attacks by protesters. Delmouzos himself and several other individuals who were connected to either the girls' school or the labour centre were accused of 'insulting religion and morality' and brought to court. The moral panic that started in Volos and soon spread to Athens, Patras, Nafplio and the rest of Greek society, can partly be understood in relation to the 'amplification spiral', to use Stanley Cohen's terminology, formed by populist newspapers such as *Kyrix* in Volos or *Skrip* in Athens.¹⁷ The emphasis in such publications was on the potential destruction of the family due to novel, feminist ideas, as well as to the abandonment of traditional ethics threatened by the spread of Marxist, materialist and atheist concepts. It was in this context that the concepts of fatherland, religion and family acquired new connotations. Not only did they form part of the critique of modernity that religious organisations and societies initiated at the turn of the century, but they also provided what might be called a firewall against the spread of Marxist and socialist ideas. The ideal traditional family which had been lauded in earlier religious moral discourse now intersected not only with gender but with class, as it came to be portrayed as the guardian of property against the threat of socialism.

All these critiques provided fertile ground for the rise of conservative cultural politics, paving the way for the linkage of terms ‘religion’ and ‘family’ with that of ‘fatherland’. Other concepts, including ‘property’ and ‘morality’ also played a secondary role in the diffusion of the slogan. This particular point became clearer during the Marasleia episode when Imvrioti, a Marxist, was accused of teaching the history of the 1821 Greek national revolution without putting the proper emphasis on the national movement and its sacrifices and triumphs; rather, it was alleged, she undermined the nationalist narrative by emphasising social causes. Moreover, the debate also acquired more specific biopolitical characteristics, since the critique of Imvrioti focused on the issue of her ‘female nature’, which, it was claimed, meant that she lacked the masculine qualities required for national struggles.

As Imvrioti's opponents claimed:

Only the male spirit can shake and move the students’ soul and can enable them to sense and understand the wise of the world, the splendid contemporary religious, political, social events or trends, so that they can be good future leaders who will create national greatness. In contrast to that, Mr Delmouzos invited a woman to teach history at the Marasleion.¹⁸

Claims that intellectual enterprises such as writing, for instance, were not suitable for the ‘female nature’, and that women should restrict themselves to intellectual areas specifically suitable for their supposed biological destiny and social roles, had surfaced earlier and had provoked intense debates between adversaries and advocates of women's intellectual capabilities.¹⁹ However, there is a crucial difference between earlier forms of critique of ‘learned women’ and the attack on Imvrioti, who was not only a woman but also a Marxist. In her case, the discourse on fatherland, religion and family became linked to the ‘feminisation of the other’, that is to an attempt to undermine political otherness (i.e. Marxism) by attributing ‘inferior’ feminine features to it.²⁰ Second, it was in this context that the traditional gender images of so-called ‘patriotic maternity’, which had dominated the national discourse throughout the nineteenth century, retreated at the expense of new images of national fatherhood and masculinity, comparable to the perspectives of fascist and national socialist biopolitics which became dominant in several European countries in the 1920s and 1930s.²¹ The propaganda of authoritarian ideologies and regimes still focused on ‘the cult of motherhood’. Still, as Gisela Bock points out, ‘as in the other masculinist dictatorships, Italy and Spain, Nazi state welfare privileged fathers over mothers, and glorified fatherhood as “nature”...Begetting children was considered more valuable than bearing and rearing them, and child allowances were paid to fathers, not to mothers; unmarried mothers obtained them only if the father of their child was known to the authorities’.²²

The paternalistic image and discourse of the dictator Ioannis Metaxas (1871–

1941) in the 1930s relied very much on this gender order which linked masculinity to fatherhood and nationhood. This was a critical transformation, not only of family images, but also of the content of the concept of the patriarchal family in the triad under discussion. The reassertion of family values through a renovated image of patriarchal and masculine figures was codified in the slogan 'Fatherland, Religion, Family' and redefined through the convergence of conservative and fascist politics at that particular historical moment.

This tendency intensified as a reaction to feminist politics in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, feminism and the women's movement emerged in Greece in the second part of the nineteenth century as part of a wider change in middle-class women's attitudes towards their position. Discrimination against women mainly urged educated, middle-class women to work on the formation of a collectivity in order to promote equality issues. Philanthropy and women's education were their primary areas of activity at the time.²³ In the course of the twentieth century, however, feminist claims were politicised in a new way as they gradually moved away from philanthropy and education issues and focused on women's suffrage as well as on family and labour laws.²⁴

I would argue that language and educational reforms in the first half of the twentieth century provided fertile ground for the re-appropriation of hegemonic gender images, social roles and practices and for the evaluation of new currents of ideas, including Marxism. It was in this context that the slogan acquired greater significance. Yet, it would not have come to dominate official discourse had it not been normalised as part of the official anti-communism of the era. The Zoe Brotherhood of Theologians, a semi-monastic Orthodox organisation, played a critical role in this respect.²⁵ Since its foundation in 1907 by Efsevios Matthopoulos (1849–1929), a former disciple of Makrakis, Zoe became engaged in an extremely intense network of activities in Greece during the twentieth century. These included teaching, preaching, publishing, leading school and youth groups and establishing Sunday schools. Zoe included groups of unmarried and highly disciplined men, both ordained priests and laymen, and its members were bound by monastic-like vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. At a later stage, Zoe allowed the formation of sisterhoods and women's groups which participated actively in its range of initiatives. The Sisterhood Efsevia was founded in 1938.²⁶ Following the Asia Minor War (1919–22) and the Greek defeat in that conflict, Zoe expanded its publishing programme and sponsored the distribution of hundreds of thousands of publications in order to revitalise both Orthodoxy and the nation. After the death of its founder, Matthopoulos, his successors Dionysios Farazoulis (1882–1920) and Serafeim Papakostas (1892–1954) introduced a specific section on religion and family in the brotherhood's weekly magazine. In it, they lamented the loss of traditional values in Greek society, while they related the latter to the salvation of the

nation, which was being threatened by atheist communism. I see this as the final stage of the consolidation of the slogan. Through its various usages in the brotherhood's public activities, the slogan 'Fatherland, Religion, Family' became linked to anti-communist propaganda, acquiring in this way new connotations. The brotherhood's close ties with the right-wing parties and the royal family in the 1950s and 1960s as well as with the Colonels' dictatorship provided space for the inclusion of the slogan in the discursive and performative terrain of authoritarian right-wing politics.

The formation of a slogan encapsulating the core doctrines of conservatism: traditionalism, patriarchal family, religious values and morality, was not a Greek novelty. On the contrary, catchphrases and slogans of this particular kind started circulating from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in various countries and contexts as part of the rise of nationalism, of the diffusion of modern printing technologies, of the emergence of mass politics and of the initiation of major propaganda campaigns. The image of the fatherland and nation as an extended family with close ties and unconditional unity dominated nationalist discourses throughout the nineteenth century.²⁷ It should be pointed out that this particular image crossed the ideological spectrum as liberal and republican movements and governments as well as explicitly conservative ones invoked patriarchal family arrangements and male authority (fraternal as well as paternal) in support of various modern patriotic state projects; one of the variables was the greater likelihood that formulations on the 'right' drew more extensively on religion while those of the 'left' more often emphasised nature and secular morality. As has been succinctly pointed out by Ruth Roach Pierson, nations became 'militarized, masculinized and familiarized' in the course of the nineteenth century.²⁸ For instance, the Italian motto 'Patria, religio, famiglia' is attributed to the liberal-democratic advocate of Italian unification, Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872).²⁹

In France, on the other hand, links between the family, the nation and religion were formed in several contexts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The formation of the revolutionary triptych 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' was a long-term process which provoked the anti-revolutionary reaction and the propagandising of the concepts of 'honour, 'fatherland' and 'property'.³⁰ Catholic women's organisations acquired similar slogans in order to provide their own variations of gender images against secular feminism and what they alleged was the dechristianisation of France. After Pope Leo XIII issued the *De Rerum Novarum* encyclical (1891) in which he criticised the rise of secular ideas and their inherent dangers, Catholic responses in France were prompt. The historian Anne Cova has studied extensively how Catholic women's organisations conceptualised themselves as 'at the service of church, fatherland and family' in the early twentieth century.³¹ They propagated the maternal mission of women, the need for the moral education of children as well as the importance of rechristianising France. When they supported

suffrage, it was in the form of the ‘family vote’ in which the father’s voting power would be enhanced with the addition of other members of the family. Their ‘reactionary feminism’ contributed to the crystallisation of an ‘eternal feminine identity’ according to traditional conceptualisations.³² These religious activities and discourses facilitated the formation of the best-known slogan of the era: ‘Travail, Patrie, Famille’. Fascist groups like Croix de Feu (1927) in France, on the other hand, employed this particular slogan in order to illustrate their ethos, although it also worked to mobilise women in new ways.³³

In Greece, the slogan I discuss is based on a variety of popular sayings, catchwords and catchphrases circulating in the late nineteenth century. Their linkage became more apparent in the discourse of religious organisations of the era as part of their critique of secular, western-type modernity. Early conservative connotations expanded as feminist and Marxist ideas, as well as new religious perceptions, gender roles, family practices and lifestyles threatened traditional beliefs and assumptions in the twentieth century. At this point, the slogan also encountered fascist conceptualisations of gender and national order and, in its final phase, the slogan acquired a more official, anti-communist undertone. Through its history, it is possible to identify some persistent principles of conservatism in twentieth-century Greece as well as to trace its intersection with fascist biopolitics at particular moments.

Notes

The paper summarises the main points and arguments of my book, *Πατρίς, Θρησκεία, Οικογένεια. Ιστορία ενός συνθήματος* [‘Fatherland, Religion, Family’: A History of a Slogan], (Athens: Polis, 2011).

- 1 For the history of the concept, see Robert Denton, ‘The Rhetorical Functions of Slogans: Classifications and Characteristics’, *Communication Quarterly* 28/2 (1980), pp. 10–18. See also Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith and Robert Denton, ‘The Persuasive Functions of Slogans’, in Robert Jackall (ed.), *Propaganda* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 400–22; Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell (eds), *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (1986; 3rd edn, Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage, 1999).
- 2 Stuart Hall, ‘The Problem of Ideology-Marxism without Guarantees’, *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10/2 (1986), pp. 28–44.
- 3 For Apostolos Makrakis, see Minas Charitos, *Ιστορία του Μεγάλου Διδασκάλου του Ελληνικού Γένους και της Ορθοδοξίας Α. Μακράκη* [History of the Great Teacher of the Greek Race and Orthodoxy A. Makrakis] (Chicago: Orthodoxos Philekpaideutikos Syllogos, 1964); Serapheim Papakostas, *Ευσέβιος Ματθόπουλος, 1849–1929 (βιογραφία)* [Eusevios Matthopoulos, 1849–1929: A Biography] (3rd edn, Athens: Zoe,

- 1980); Thanassis Kalafatis, 'Όπαδοί του Α. Μακράκη', *Τα Ιστορικά* (Disciples of A. Makrakis), *Τα Ιστορικά/ Historica* 18/9 (1993), pp. 113–42; Leon Brang, *Το Μέλλον του Ελληνισμού στον ιδεολογικό κόσμο του Απόστολου Μακράκη* [*The Future of Hellenism in A. Makrakis's Ideological World*] (Athens: Armos, 1997).
- 4 For Greece's national aspirations at the time, see Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (eds), *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism and the Uses of the Past (1797–1896)* (London: Sage, 2009). For a general overview of Greek nationalism and politics, see John S. Koliopoulos and Thanos Veremis, *Greece: The Modern Sequel from 1831 to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 227–75; Thomas G. Gallant, *Modern Greece* (London: Hodder Headline, 2001), esp. pp. 55–74.
- 5 'Εγκύκλιος παραινετική κατά της διδασκαλίας του Αποστόλου Μακράκη' [Admonitory Encyclical against the Teaching of A. Makrakis], no. 2469, 21 December 1878, in *Συλλογή των Εγκυκλίων της Ιεράς Συνόδου της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος μετά των οικείων Νόμων, βασιλικών Διαταγμάτων, Υπουργικών Αποφάσεων, Οδηγιών κτλ. από του 1833 μέχρι του 1901 υπό Στ. Γιαννόπουλου, Αρχιμανδρίτη* [*Collection of the Encyclicals of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece with the Relevant Laws, Royal Decrees, Ministerial Decisions, Directives from 1833 to 1901 by St. Giannopoulos, Archimandrite*], (1876; repr. Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1998), pp. 940–44.
- 6 For Makrakis's educational system, see A. Makrakis, *Νέον Εκπαιδευτικόν Σύστημα κατά την Προαιώνιον βούλησιν του Θεού. Γραμματομάθεια-Λεξιμάθεια και Λογομάθεια και Φιλοσοφικοί Λόγοι Δύο περί της Σχέσεως της Παιδείας και της Πολιτείας* [*New Educational System According to God's Ageless Will: Learning the Letters, the Words and the Discourses and Two Discourses on the Relation between Education and the State*] (Athens: Vasilakos, 1876).
- 7 Theodore Kritikos, 'Science and Religion in 19th Century Greece', *Historiein* 1 (1999), pp. 35–50. See also Eirini Mergoupi-Savaidou, 'Δημόσιος Λόγος περί Επιστήμης στην Ελλάδα, 1870–1900: Εκλαικευτικά εγχειρήματα στο Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, στους πολιτιστικούς συλλόγους και στα περιοδι' [The Public Discourse on Science in Greece, 1870–1900: Science Popularisation at the University of Athens, at the Cultural Clubs and the Periodical Press] (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Athens, 2010), esp. ch. 7, pp. 357–412.
- 8 For the reception of Darwinism, see the overview by Thomas Glick,

- ‘Reception of Darwinism: A Brief History’, *Science and Education* 19 (2010), pp. 693–703. See also Thomas Glick (ed.), *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism* (1974; 2nd edn, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- 9 M. Galanos, ‘Ἄνδρες και Γυναίκες’ [Men and Women], *Anaplassis*, 1 June 1894, Year Z', no. 147, pp. 2145–8. For the *Ladies' Gazette*, see Eleni Varikas, *Η εξέγερση των Κυριών. Η γένεση μιας φεμινιστικής συνειδησης στην Ελλάδα, 1833–1907* [*The Revolt of the Ladies: The Formation of a Feminist Consciousness in Greece, 1833–1907*] (1987; 2nd edn, Athens: Katarti, 1996). For the tensions involved in the intersection between religious beliefs and feminism in a different context, see Sue Morgan (ed.), *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
 - 10 M. Galanos, ‘Ἡμεῖς ἢ Σεῖς;’ [‘Us or You?’], *Anaplassis*, 1 November 1894, Year Z', no. 157, pp. 2317–18. For the image of feminism as a ‘foreign fashion’ in nineteenth-century Greece, see Angelika Psarra, ‘A Gift from the New World: Greek Feminists between East and West (1880–1930)’, in Anna Frangoudaki and Caglar Keyder (eds), *Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey: Encounters with Europe, 1850–1950* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 150–75.
 - 11 For the impact of Darwinism and evolutionism in the Orthodox world, see Efthymios Nicolaidis, *Science and Eastern Orthodoxy: From the Greek Fathers to the Age of Globalization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 180 ff.
 - 12 The Greek language question was a major controversy over whether the official language of the Greek nation should be the vernacular (demotic Greek) or an artificial form imitating Ancient Greek (katharevousa). The controversy between ‘demoticists’ (advocates of the demotic) and ‘purists’ (advocates of katharevousa) spread over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and also linked to other social, political and ideological debates and disputes. It was finally resolved in 1976 when demotic was established as the official language.
 - 13 For these issues, see *Ευαγγελικά (1901) – Ορεσσειακά (1903). Νεωτερικές Πιέσεις και Κοινωνικές Αντιστάσεις. Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο* [*The Gospel Riots (1901) – The Oresteia Riots (1903): Modernising Pressures and Social Resistance. A Scientific Symposium*] (Athens: Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού Πολιτισμού και Γενικής Παιδείας, 2005). See also Philip Carabott, ‘Politics, Orthodoxy and the Language Question in Greece: The Gospel Riots of November 1901’, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 3 (1993), pp. 117–38; Rena Stavridi-Patrikiou, *Οι φόβοι του 20^{ου} αιώνα* [*The Fears of the 20th Century*], (Athens: Metaixmio, 20), pp. 74–88; Niki

Maroniti, *Πολιτική Εξουσία και εθνικό ζήτημα στην Ελλάδα (1880–1910)* [*Political Power and the National Question in Greece (1880–1910)*], (Athens: Alexandraia, 2009), pp. 327–75. On the wider cultural and intellectual climate of the era, see Alexis Politis, ‘Μια επισκόπηση της πνευματικής ζωής στην τελευταία δεκαετία του 19^{ου} αιώνα’ [An Outline of Intellectual Life in the Last Decade of the 19th Century], in his *Αποτυπώματα του Χρόνου. Ιστορικά δοκίμια για μια μη θεωρητική θεωρία* [*Prints of Time. Historical Essays for a Non-Theoretical Theory*] (Athens: Polis, 2006), pp. 142–72.

- 14 For the Atheika, see Charalambos Charitos, *Το Παρθεναγωγείο του βόλου* [*The Girls’ School in Volos*], 2 vols (A,B) (Athens: Istoriko Arxeio Ellinikis Neolaias, 1989). For the Marasleika, see the detailed study of Maria Repousi, *Τα Μαρασλειακά, 1925–1927* [*The Marasleion Events, 1925–1927*] (Athens: Polis, 2012).
- 15 For the traditional frame of girls’ education in nineteenth-century Greece, see Sidiroula Ziogou-Karastergiou, *Η μέση εκπαίδευση των κοριτσιών στην Ελλάδα (1830–1983)* [*Secondary Education for Girls in Greece, 1830–1938*] (Athens: Istoriko Arxeio Ellinikis Neolaias, 1986); Sidiroula Ziogou-Karastergiou, ‘Φρονίμους Δεσποινίδας και αρίστας μητέρας: στόχοι Παρθεναγωγείων και εκπαιδευτική πολιτική στον 19^ο αιώνα’ [Prudent Ingenues and Excellent Mothers: Aims of Girls’ Schools and Educational Policies in the 19th Century], in *Πρακτικά του Διεθνούς Συμποσίου Ιστορικότητα της Παιδικής Ηλικίας και της Νεότητας* [*Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Historicity of Childhood and Youth*] (Athens: Istoriko Arxeio Ellinikis Neolaias, 1986), pp. 479–96, Alexandra Bakalaki and Eleni Elegmitou, *Η εκπαίδευση «εις τα του οίκου» και τα γυναικεία καθήκοντα. Από την ίδρυση του ελληνικού κράτους έως την εκπαιδευτική μεταρρύθμιση του 1929* [*Education in ‘Domestic Tasks’ and Women’s Duties from the Formation of the Greek State until the Education Reform of 1929*] (Athens: Istoriko Arxeio Ellinikis Neolaias, 1987); Eleni Fournaraki, *Εκπαίδευση και αγωγή των κοριτσιών. Ελληνικοί προβληματισμοί (1830–1910). Ένα ανθολόγιο* [*Education and Girls’ Upbringing: Greek Considerations (1830–1910) An Anthology*] (Athens: Istoriko Arxeio Ellinikis Neolaias, 1987); Dimitra Tzanaki, *Δούλα και Κυρά. Όψεις εθνικισμού: Ρόλοι και Συμπεριφορές στην Ελλάδα των ρομαντικών χρόνων, 1836–1897* [*Slave and Mistress. Aspects of Nationalism: Roles and Behaviours in Greece during the Romantic Period, 1836–1897*] (Athens: Savvalas, 2007). For different attitudes and perceptions towards the curriculum of boys’ and girls’ education, see Christina Koulouri, *Ιστορία και Γεωγραφία στα ελληνικά σχολεία (1834–1914). Γνωστικό αντικείμενο και ιδεολογικές προεκτάσεις* [*History and Geography in Greek Schools (1834–1914). Disciplinary Object and Ideological Dimensions*], (Athens: Istoriko Arxeio Ellinikis Neolaias,

- 16 Cited in Charitos, *Το Παρθενγωγχείον του βόλου* [*The Girls' School in Volos*], vol. A, p. 277.
- 17 On the analytical concept of 'moral panic', see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1973; 3rd edn, London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (eds), *Moral Panics. The Social Construction of Deviance* (London: Blackwell, 2003); Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).
- 18 P. I. Theodoropoulos, A. Papazachariou and S. Kalliafas, *Αναίρεσις των Μαρασλειακών του Αρεοπαγίτου κ. Γ. Αντωνακάκη* [*Against the Marasleiaka of Justice Mr G. Antonakakis*] (Athens: Vitsikounakis, 1926), p. 3. See also Alexis Dimaras, *Η μεταρρύθμιση που δεν έγινε. Τεκμήρια Ιστορίας (1895–1967)* [*The Reform that Never Was: Historical Evidence (1895–1967)*], 2 vols (Athens: Ermis, 1990), vol. 2, p. 34.
- 19 On these earlier debates, see Irene Rizaki, *Οι 'γράφουσες' Ελληνίδες. Σημειώσεις για τη γυναικεία λογοισύνη του 19^{ου} αιώνα* [*The 'Learned' Greek Women: Notes on Female Scholarship in the 19th Century*] (Athens: Katarti, 2007), esp. pp. 187–231.
- 20 For an analysis of the 'feminisation of the other', see Ida Blom, 'Gender and Nation in International Comparison', in Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 15.
- 21 See Gisela Bock, 'Equality and Difference in National Socialist Racism', in Joan Wallach Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 267–90. For an overall analysis, see George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
- 22 Bock, 'Equality and Difference', p. 280. See also Gisela Bock, 'Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State', *Signs* 8 (1983), pp. 400–21.
- 23 Varikas, *Η εξέγερση των Κυριών* [*The Revolt of the Ladies*]. See also Gabriella Lazaridis, 'The Feminist Movement in Greece: An Overview', *Journal of Gender Studies* 3 (1994), pp. 205–9.
- 24 Efi Avdela and Angelika Psarra, *Ο φεμινισμός στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου. Μια ανθολογία* [*Feminism in Interwar Greece: An anthology*] (Athens: Gnossi, 1985). See also Eleni Varikas, 'Gender and National Identity in fin-de-siècle Greece', *Gender & History* 5 (1993), pp. 269–83; Efi Avdela, 'Between Duties and Rights: Gender and Citizenship

- in Greece, 1864–1975’, in Faruk Birtek and Thalia Dragonas (eds), *Citizenship and the Nation State in Greece and Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 117–43; Efi Avdela and Angelika Psarra, ‘Engendering “Greekness”: Women’s Emancipation and Irredentist Politics in Nineteenth-Century Greece’, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20 (2005), pp. 67–79.
- 25 For religious organisations and groups in Greece, see Polykarpos Karamouzis, ‘*Κράτος, Εκκλησία και Εθνική Ιδεολογία στη Νεώτερη Ελλάδα. Η πολιτική διαμεσολάβηση της θρησκείας στη νεοελληνική κοινωνία του μεσοπολέμου*’ [State, Church and National Ideology in Modern Greece: The Political Mediation of Religion in Interwar Greek Society] (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Athens, 2004); Vasileios Gioultsis, ‘Κοινωνιολογική θεώρηση των θρησκευτικών Αδελφοτήτων’ [A Sociological Approach to Religious Fraternities], in G. Mantzaridis (ed.), *Θέματα Κοινωνιολογίας της Ορθοδοξίας* [Themes in the Sociology of Orthodoxy] (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1975), pp. 169–204; Alexandros Alexandridis, ‘Ένα φαινόμενο της νεοελληνικής θρησκευτικής ζωής: οι χριστιανικές οργανώσεις’ [A Phenomenon of Modern Greek Religiosity: The Religious Organisations] *Synoro* [Frontier] 39 (1966), pp. 193–204; A. Gousidis, *Οι χριστιανικές οργανώσεις. Η περίπτωση της Αδελφότητας Θεολόγων η «Ζωή»* [Religious Organisations: The Case of the ‘Zoe’ Brotherhood of Theologians] (Thessaloniki: Melissa, 1989); Vasilios N. Makrides, ‘The Brotherhoods of Theologians in Contemporary Greece’, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 33 (1988), pp. 167–87; Angelos Giannakopoulos, *Die Theologen-Bruderschaften in Griechenland* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1999).
- 26 For the involvement of women in religious organisations in this particular period, see Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, ‘Emancipation through Celibacy? The Sisterhoods of the Zoe Movement and their Role in the Development of “Christian Feminism” in Greece 1938–1960’, in Trine Stauning Willert and Lina Molokotos-Liederman (eds), *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice* (London: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 101–21.
- 27 See Paul Ginsborg and Ilaria Porciani (eds), ‘Famiglia, società civile e stato tra otto e novecento’, special issue of *Passato e Presente* 57 (2002).
- 28 Ruth Roach Pierson, ‘Nations: Gendered, Racialized, Crossed with Empire’, in Blom, Hagemann and Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations*, pp. 41–61.
- 29 Ilaria Porciani, ‘Famiglia e nazione nel lungo Ottocento’, *Passato e Presente* 57 (2002), pp. 9–39.

- 30 Mona Ozouf, 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols (1st edn 1984–1992; Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1997), vol. 3, pp. 4353–88.
- 31 Anne Cova, *'Au service de l' Eglise, de la patrie et de la famille': Femmes catholiques et maternité sous la IIIe République* (Paris: L' Harmattan, 2000). For the French Catholic organisations of the era, see also Corinne Bonafoux-Verrax, *À la droite de Dieu: La Fédération Nationale Catholique 1924–1944* (Paris, Fayard, 2004).
- 32 See the points made by Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to a Political Sociology of Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
- 33 Albert Kéchichian, *Les Croix de Feu à l' âge des fascismes: Travail Famille Patrie* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2006). For the activities of women in the Croix de Feu and its successor, the Parti Social Français, and for their implications for the ideological and political identity of the French Right, see Laura Lee Downs, "'Nous plantons les trois couleurs": Action sociale féminine et recomposition des politiques de la droite française: Le mouvement Croix de Feu et le Parti Social Français, 1934–1947', *Revue d' histoire moderne et contemporaine* 58/ 3 (2011), pp. 118–63.

The More Things Change: Debating Gender and Religion in India's Hindu Laws, 1920–2006

Rina Verma Williams

Gender historians of South Asia have illuminated the multiple ways in which gender and religion were constitutive of colonial rule in British India. In this study, I argue that this historical legacy has seeped into the present: that gender and religion have constituted postcolonial rule as well, in ways that are both similar to, and different from, the colonial era. To show this, I focus on debates over Hindu religious laws over time. Copious and insightful historical and political analyses have examined religious laws or debates, or single pieces of legislation, generally in one time period.¹ But comparative studies of religious laws in India, comparing either across religions or across time, have been relatively scant in the literature.² This study uses temporal comparison to reveal what snapshot analyses cannot, illuminating both what has changed and what has not in the gendered and religious construction of state legitimacy in colonial and postcolonial India. Like the British colonial state, the Indian postcolonial state sought to reform religion (by reforming religious laws) and constructed women as symbols of progress and modernisation, thus underpinning its legitimacy to rule and manifesting its own postcolonial version of the civilising mission.

The study shows important changes, as well as continuities, in the debates over time. Two key changes were in the terms of the debates and the participation of women legislators in them. The terms of the debates shifted from a focus on religious textual authenticity to an almost exclusive concern with gender equity and women's rights; and where no women participated in the earliest debates, by 2006 they were the primary participants. The first set of debates took place in the early 1920s and centred on whether codifying the Hindu personal laws would do more to preserve or to undermine their religious textual authenticity. The second major set of debates took place in the 1940s and 1950s, during a transitional period as India approached independence and the colonial state reconfigured itself as a postcolonial state. In this period, the debates showed an inherent tension between a traditional(ising) and a modern(ising) vision of the new Indian nation, while both visions remained fundamentally religious and gendered. Finally, the most recent debates in 2006 were conducted overtly on the basis of gender and women's rights, even as religion receded to the background. Thus these

debates came (back) full circle most explicitly to the historical place they may never have left: the modern refiguring of the post/colonial state's (gendered and religious) civilising/modernising mission. The arc of the debates over time suggests that, where British colonists held that Indians were unfit to govern themselves based on the status of 'their' women, the postcolonial Indian state has sought to prove its fitness to govern by seeking to improve the status of 'its own' women.

These changes, in turn, suggest what has not changed over time, and that is the fundamentally religious and gendered character of governance that remains one of the key legacies of British colonial rule in India. The British civilising mission was constituted in fundamentally religious and gendered terms. The colonial state constructed its legitimacy in terms of a civilising mission that simultaneously (and contradictorily) claimed non-interference: that is, it would avoid interfering in native religious affairs even as it sought to civilise Indians and Indian society by ameliorating the condition of Indian women. After independence, the newly postcolonial Indian state took on the mantle of its predecessor, seeking now to modernise and progress in much the same ways the colonial state had sought to civilise: on the grounds of religion and gender.

This religious and gendered 'civilising' mission in its postcolonial incarnation manifested as a 'modernising' mission. The civilising and modernising missions were grounded in religion because they conceived Indians in fundamentally communal terms: they saw (and in many ways still see) Indians first and foremost as members of religiously defined communities. And they are gendered in that the signs and symbols of civilisation, of progress and modernisation – as much as the signs and symbols of 'tradition' and the past – are women and women's rights.

In the colonial, as in the postcolonial period, laws and progress on expanding women's legal rights took place mostly on paper; actual implementation was only of secondary importance. Civilisation, progress and modernisation did not, and need not, correspond to material changes in the lives of real women: for change and reform to remain abstract, on paper and in the law books, was sufficient to demonstrate the onward march of civilisation and modernisation. Change and progress were enacted more for the sake of enacting them rather than actually achieving them. As Samuel Huntington argued, modernity is about change; it is a process rather than a condition.³ Both civilising and modernising were gerunds in the true sense of the word: they represented activities, processes that were realised in the doing or the seeking of them, rather than actual, attainable states of being.

I begin by examining the role of gender and religion in the late colonial period, through an analysis of the early 1920s debates on Hindu religious law and an overview of secondary historical literature on the period. I then analyse gender and religion in the debates on Hindu personal law between 1943 and

1956, at the moment of transition from colonial to postcolonial rule, then turning to the most recent debates of 2006. I undertake close reading and interpretation of the legislative and parliamentary debates in each of these three periods, supplemented by government reports; correspondence of political leaders; public opinion surveys; and the activities of social organisations. I conclude by briefly considering the implications of the analysis for Indian governance and women's rights.

The early 1920s debates: British, colonial, civilising

India – like many former colonies – has a legal system of religious ‘personal laws’, in which laws relating to the family are governed by an individual's religion. Instead of imposing uniform, territorial family laws, the British determined in 1772 to apply each community's own family laws to that community. Warren Hastings, then the Governor-General of India, decreed that on the topics of ‘inheritance, marriage, cast [*sic*] and other religious usages or institutions, the laws of the Koran with respect to the Mohammedans, and those of the Shaster with respect to the Gentoos, shall be invariably adhered to’.⁴ The religious family laws so preserved have come to be known as the personal laws.⁵ Personal laws included, or came to include, laws on marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, succession, adoption and guardianship. India's personal laws later served as a model for British colonies in Africa and elsewhere. In South Asia and parts of the Muslim world, personal laws are applied primarily on the basis of religion. In other parts of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, they are applied on the basis of tribe, custom and ethnicity as well as religion.

India retained the personal laws at independence largely as a form of multicultural protection of group or community religious rights. The personal laws have become gendered symbols for religiously defined community rights and identity in Indian politics. The major religious communities in India that have their own personal laws are the majority Hindu community, and the Muslim, Christian, Parsi and Jewish communities. By the 1860s, the British colonial government had established uniform civil, criminal and penal codes in India; but based on Hastings's 1772 decree, they had not codified the personal laws. Instead, they took what was called a ‘piecemeal approach’ to the personal laws: this meant legislation or judicial decisions on specific topics such as child marriage or property rights. But they shied away from codification: a comprehensive approach to construct one uniform, codified Hindu personal law. In March 1921, some Indian leaders began debating just such a codification. They moved resolutions in both chambers of the Viceroy's Legislative Council that called on the Government of India to form a committee to study the possibility of drafting a Hindu Code, uniformly applicable to Hindus throughout British India.⁶

The overt fulcrum on which debate over these resolutions hinged was what I call religious textual authenticity: the extent to which the personal laws reflected their religious textual sources, and whether or not preserving textual authenticity would be best served by codification *versus* a piecemeal approach. Members who supported codification feared that piecemeal legislation would destroy the original, religious textual sources of Hindu personal law. They feared that piecemeal legislation would further confuse an already complex system, arguing that Hindu personal law was already such a legal mess that ‘the present-day Hindu cannot quite know where he is, on any point of law’.⁷ They saw codification as a way to halt this entropic process and return to the classical, textual roots of Hindu family law.

Opponents of codification, on the other hand, feared it would create rigidity in the laws and stamp out local customs. They argued that Indian personal laws and customs were still in a process of natural evolution that should not be artificially tampered with. Many opponents of codification were also concerned about the cost and feasibility of the task, arguing that codification would involve enormous effort, and so they advocated piecemeal legislation instead. The government in 1921 agreed with this position. Arguing against the resolutions, T. B. Saprú, the government's Law Member at the time, held that more piecemeal legislation needed to accumulate before codification could profitably be undertaken. The official position was that ‘the task of codifying the entire personal law of the Hindus was too stupendous to be undertaken and...the best course was to do the work piecemeal’.⁸ The government was not legally bound to implement the resolutions; but had they passed, British officials would have faced a choice between committing to a path of codification, or ignoring the resolutions. The British colonial government was committed at least in rhetoric to non-interference in native religious affairs, and this stance underpinned its resistance to codification. In the event, they managed to avert a vote: both resolutions were withdrawn on the promise that the Law Member would study the matter further.

On the surface, concerns around gender equity or women's rights – or indeed, even just women – seemed absent from these debates over Hindu personal law, which hinged largely on religious textual authenticity. Yet gender was deeply embedded in the piecemeal approach that won the day as the favoured approach to socio-religious legal reform in this period. In the colonial period, a basic contradiction existed between the colonial state's declared policy of non-interference in native religious affairs and its agenda of social reformism. Even as they declared non-interference in native religious affairs, British colonial authorities reformed aspects of Hindu social practices in a piecemeal fashion throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. Examples included the abolition of *satī* (1829); the Caste Disabilities Removal Act (1850); the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act (1856) and the Age of Consent Act (1891). Another important example was the Sarda

Act (Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929), which raised the age of marriage for all communities, not just Hindus.⁹

Many of these acts were meant ostensibly to improve the status of 'native' Indian women – in Gayatri Spivak's now (in)famous terms, such legislation represented 'white men...saving brown women from brown men'.¹⁰ Such reforms were often carried out with the support of, and even at the behest of, Indian reformers such as Raja Rammohan Roy – though with minimal involvement of women themselves. By one count, over twenty such social reform acts, impinging on both religion and gender, were passed between 1865 and 1939.¹¹ Thus there was a fairly striking contradiction in the late colonial period between the rhetoric of non-interference and the absence of attention to gender and women's rights in debates over Hindu personal law on the one hand, and the virtual onslaught of (gendered and religious) social reform legislation on the other.

The literature on this social reform legislation in the late colonial period is robust. Gender historians of South Asia have made enormous contributions to our understanding of the constitutive nature of gender and religion on the one hand, and colonial rule on the other. Mrinalini Sinha has argued brilliantly that British colonialism constructed Indians as effeminate and in turn western colonisers as eminently masculine.¹² Partha Chatterjee argued that the 'woman question' of the late eighteenth century – which was a question about how Indian women, and thus the Indian nation, could be modernised – was resolved by native/Indian men (re)claiming the right to rule and reform the private, domestic sphere of the 'home' even before they made a claim to take control of the public, political sphere of the 'world' from the British.¹³ Social reforms were ostensibly about protecting women and raising the status of women in India. But Lata Mani argued that women were neither the subjects nor the objects of these reforms. Instead, Mani argued, the reforms were about constructing 'Indian tradition' as regressive and uncivilised, and women became the site for these constructions.¹⁴

More recently, some gender historians of South Asia have suggested that after the turn of the twentieth century, the late colonial period was marked by the greater participation of women in social reform legislation, and that this shift marked a (limited) reclaiming of subjecthood by women. Ishita Pande has argued that as the objects of social reform shifted from women to children, 'Women were no longer the mere ground upon which a debate on tradition was to be conducted; nor were they easily identified with the "inner" realm of the nation that was to be modernised whilst being protected from the speculum of the colonial state'.¹⁵ Without denying that shifting objects of reform certainly complicated the role and status of women, my findings suggest that in certain critical ways, women have remained the site or terrain of reform in postcolonial India, even as they may have laid claim to greater subjecthood. To demonstrate this, I turn to the debates of the postcolonial

period.

Debates of the 1940s and 1950s: moment of transition

The second round of debates on Hindu personal law occurred between 1943 and 1956. India's first democratically elected Parliament ultimately debated and passed four bills (known collectively as the Hindu Code Bills, or HCB) between 1952 and 1956 (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Hindu Code Bills in Parliament

	Introduced	Passed
Hindu Marriage & Divorce Bill	December 1952	May 1955
Hindu Succession Bill	December 1952	May 1956
Hindu Minority & Guardianship Bill	April 1954	July 1956
Hindu Adoptions & Maintenance Bill	August 1956	December 1956

The proximate impetus to codify and reform Hindu personal law came after the passage of the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937 (also known as the Deshmukh Act). This legislation introduced substantial changes in the way property in a Hindu joint family devolved, and created a large number of difficulties of interpretation. By 1938, an unwieldy number of amendments and modifying legislation had come up that sought to clarify the ambiguities and resulting complications produced by the Act, until ‘so many Bills were pending that the only course was to order an investigation of the situation as a whole’.¹⁶

The resultant legislation initially took the form of an omnibus bill, introduced into the Constituent Assembly, which consisted of eight major parts.¹⁷ Part I defined who was a Hindu and abolished the caste system. It stated that the Hindu Code would apply to anyone who was not a Muslim, Parsi, Christian or Jew, and established one personal law applicable to all Hindus so defined. Part II of the Code dealt with marriage; Part III with adoption; Part IV with guardianship; and Part V, perhaps the most controversial part, with joint family property. Part VI of the Code concerned women's property; and Parts VII and VIII dealt with succession and maintenance, respectively. This consolidated draft bill departed from the classical Hindu personal law in four main ways. First, it provided for separation or dissolution of a Hindu marriage, previously unknown in Hindu personal law (although commonly practised by custom among the lower castes). Second, it established one joint family system of property ownership for all Hindus. Third, it gave a share of inheritance to daughters; and fourth, it gave widows absolute rather than

restricted property rights.

The omnibus bill garnered significant opposition from conservative Hindus, however, and had to be shelved until after the first elections in 1951–2. At that point, the larger bill was broken into four separate bills: The Hindu Marriage and Divorce Bill (passed 1955); the Hindu Succession Bill (passed 1956); the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Bill (passed 1956); and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Bill (passed 1956).

This legislation thus involved not only codification but also reform of Hindu personal law. While codification could at least in theory be done without altering the substantive content of the laws (and thereby holding the focus on religious textual authenticity), reform meant explicitly addressing the substantive content of the laws to modernise and rationalise them, closely intertwined with the idea of making them more gender just. This signalled a critical shift from colonial to postcolonial authority, as the newly independent Indian state prepared to take the mantle of its predecessor's civilising mission as its own basis of legitimacy. As independence and democratic elections came to India, concerns of religious textual authenticity were seemingly displaced by discourses of social stability, the role of tradition, modernisation, progress and nation-building. But both opponents and proponents of the reforms and codification continued to construct religiously grounded arguments in fundamentally gendered terms. Opponents constructed their arguments against the HCB primarily in terms of preserving Hindu socio-religious tradition, while supporters argued primarily in terms of building secular Indian national identity via legal unity. But both sides constructed through the debates a religiously delimited and deeply gendered vision of Indian nation and society – in Benedict Anderson's phrase, the community they imagined.¹⁸

The core of the opposition's argument was that the HCB would destroy Hindu society. They did refer to religious principles and sometimes even texts of Hinduism, as when Jaswant Singh (Independent MP from Rajasthan) declared the HCB went 'against the tenets of our Shastras and against our Vedas'.¹⁹ But the Hinduism they sought to save was a social system more than a set of religious textual prescriptions. These were not religious scholars arguing that specific principles of Hindu religious texts were being violated; instead the Hinduism that opponents were trying to preserve was a gendered amalgam of custom, interpretation and practice. And they were convinced that altering the ingredients of that gendered social cocktail would lead to the destruction of Hindu society at its core. R. K. Mookerji (Nominated Member of the Rajya Sabha) argued that the proposed reforms would be 'creating tendencies towards the disintegration of the traditional Hindu family', causing family relations to degenerate into bickering, conflict, and controversy.²⁰ According to opponents, if a few unrepresentative, modernised, westernised, overeducated – *inauthentic* – women insisted on pressing their demand for

equal rights, the peace and stability of family relations would be destroyed. Kishen Chand (Praja Socialist Party, Andhra Pradesh), for example, held that

the support to this Bill that has come under the garb of modernism is really an attempt to disrupt society, an indirect attempt to bring religion into contempt...we should carefully consider, when we are examining this Bill, whether the clauses [are eventually] going to lead to the disruption of Hindu or more correctly the Indian society.²¹

So (Hindu) women came to bear the burden of preserving social unity and family harmony in the conservative vision. Their statements clearly demonstrated how 'religion' got equated with 'society' and 'Hindu' got equated with 'Indian' in the arguments of opponents. They sought to move forward by going back, as, in their arguments they constructed (or invented, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger) the very 'traditions' they sought to (re)capture.²²

If Hindu socio-religious tradition turned critically on gender for conservative opponents, secular Indian modernisation and progress turned no less critically on gender for supporters of the HCB. Proponents of the HCB expressed their support in terms of modernising India and building a sense of Indian national unity.²³ Some supporters did argue that the HCB should be passed to enhance the legal and social status of Hindu women as a value in its own right. Women were the most likely of all supporters to argue in these terms.²⁴ Ultimately, though, most progressives supported greater legal rights for women because raising the status of women was critical for the future of the nation. Here the idea – widely attributed to James Mill – took centre stage that the status of a civilisation can be judged by the condition of its women: supporters advocated the HCB because they believed it was necessary for the status of Indian civilisation and the unity and progress of the nation as a whole.²⁵ Bhupesh Gupta noted that 'the state of a civilisation is judged by the status of the women in it. Therefore, we are keenly interested in seeing that the women are liberated from all kinds of tyranny they are suffering from today'.²⁶ Thus some other, 'larger' purposes were to be attained by the HCB – modernisation, progress and the revitalisation of Indian (or at least Hindu) civilisation.

The Indian government under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the ruling Congress Party in the 1950s shared this nationalist definition of the issue and the same basic approach as progressive supporters of the bills. Nehru supported the HCB above all for achieving national unity and social progress, which he viewed as proceeding hand-in-hand with political and economic progress. For Nehru, the reform and codification of Hindu personal law had

a peculiar significance, not only because of the changes they bring about but chiefly because they have pulled out Hindu law from the rut in which it had got stuck and given it a new dynamism...we have not only striven for

and achieved a political revolution, not only are we striving hard for an economic revolution, [but] we are equally intent on social revolution; only by way of advance on these three separate lines and their integration into one great whole, will the people of India progress.²⁷

Nehru echoed Mill as directly as many other supporters: 'I have long been convinced that a nation's progress is intimately connected with the status of its women.'²⁸ And it was for this reason that the position of Hindu women needed to be raised.

In this way, the status of women became a (if not the) yardstick by which modernisation and progress were to be measured. Just as women carried the burden of preserving Hindu socio-religious tradition in the conservative conception, so they carried the burden of national secular modernisation in the progressive conception. If women did not modernise and progress (or if they were not modernised and progressed, so to speak), then the nation itself, by definition, could not do so either. In the 1940s and 1950s, women participated in the debates both inside and outside Parliament, and accordingly laid claim to greater subjecthood than they had in the colonial period. But they still were not the primary objects of the reforms, which were more about preserving Hindu socio-religious tradition for opponents or constructing secular Indian modernity for supporters – and women remained the grounds on which these alternate conceptions of India were constructed, much as Mani had argued for the colonial period.

As India approached and negotiated independence and then democracy, the newly becoming postcolonial state began explicitly constructing the bases of its legitimacy in religious and gendered terms, and the civilising mission of the colonial state was echoed as a modernising vision for the postcolonial state. Opponents wanted to build the new nation on a traditional base, by returning to (or preserving) its socio-religious roots, while proponents of the HCB envisioned a modern, progressive, linearly forward-moving national society. Both visions were constructed in gendered terms that pulled women in two seemingly opposite directions – forward and back. This axis of discourse reached its apogee in the most recent debates of 2006.

The 2006 debates: Indian, postcolonial, modernising

The debates of 2006 focused on an amendment to the Hindu Succession Act (HSA) of 1956 that made Hindu women members of the Hindu joint family (or 'coparceners'), thus giving them some greater rights in property succession than the 1956 Act had allowed. The amendment itself was the recommendation of a 2000 Law Commission report that had long been sought by women's rights organisations and was finally commissioned by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)

government. The amendment was introduced, debated, and passed by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. So the legislation carried broad support across party lines, and indeed as expected it passed by wide margins in both houses of Parliament.

The debates over the 2006 amendment were conducted largely in terms of gender equity and women's rights, but religion still came in through the side door. The majority of those who spoke on the amendment supported it; only seven of seventeen speakers in the Lok Sabha opposed it. All seven opponents were men; so no women MPs spoke against the bill. Of ten supporters, five were women and five were men. Debate in the Rajya Sabha was less disparate: there, only six MPs spoke on the bill, of whom five were women. One man spoke very briefly in favour of it.

Supporters argued for the need to give women greater property rights in their natal family rather than assuming they would henceforth get any rights only or primarily from their marital family. The change was advocated as a matter of financial security for women – married or not – but also symbolically as a matter of equity and the dignity of membership in the family. The Minister of Law and Justice, H. R. Bhardwaj, who piloted the bill through Parliament, argued that its purpose was ‘to give complete legal equality for women in all spheres...especially by removing discriminative legislation and by enacting a new legislation that gives equal rights of ownership of all assets like houses and land’.²⁹ He argued on multiple occasions that Hindus must abandon the idea that

Once the marriage is solemnised, the father tells his daughter that her parental home is no longer her's [*sic*]...he should rather tell her that the house where she was born is always her's [*sic*]...She will have two homes from the day of her marriage.³⁰

Many supporters argued in favour of women's rights as a value in itself: ‘There is absolutely no denying the fact that both men and women should have equal rights and responsibilities in every respect’.³¹ Many linked the bill to other legislation for women, including the multiply-failed bill to reserve seats for women in the Parliament (finally passed in the Rajya Sabha in March 2010, but yet to pass the Lok Sabha) and a domestic violence bill that had passed just the week prior to the debates over the HSA amendment, while others argued that passing the amendment would alleviate other social ills such as dowry and dowry deaths.³² So the HSA amendment came to stand in for, and with, a ‘package’ of pro-women's rights reforms and legislation.

As in the 1940s–50s debates, a few supporters asked how India could consider itself developing and modernising when women's legal rights remained stuck in the distant past. With such limited legislation, several supporters wondered, ‘how can we think and say that our country is going towards development?’³³ So Mill reappeared in 2006:

this Bill, although cosmetic in nature, provides a way for the betterment of women. No society, whether it is developed or developing, can claim to be a civilised society or a developed society unless half of its women population [*sic*] develops.³⁴

The 1921 debates had been constructed in terms of religion, but gender came in through a side door. By 2006, the reverse was true: even as the overt framework for the debates was women and gender, religion came back in. But where religious textual authenticity had been the goal in the 1920s, it became the villain by 2006. Supporters were likely to blame religious texts and authority for the unequal rights and status accorded to women.

In spite of these statutory measures being in place, gender disparity has been very deep-rooted...this is something that dates back to the ancient days because our laws, the Hindu laws governing succession have their birth in our *Dharmashastras* which are our ancient scriptures. Even the *Mitakshara* and the *Daya Bhaga* school of legal doctrines have their birth in the 12th century AD.³⁵

Another blamed the patriarchal, male-dominated character of most major organised religions for the oppressed status of women. Referring to Hindu lawmakers and deities, B. Mahtab argued that 'Manu had no daughters, nor Shri Rama, nor Shri Krishna. Kauravas had only one sister, Pandavas had none. Jesus was the only son of Joseph and Mary. Most of the scriptures have been written by male members'.³⁶ A female supporter in the Rajya Sabha was less willing to let living lawmakers rather than long-dead ones off the hook: 'it is not only Manu who advocated women[']s subordination, but even our legislature and the judiciary made women dependent and subservient to man'.³⁷

Opposition to the amendment in 2006 was relatively muted compared to the 1940s–1950s. In place of caustic barbs, opponents offered more circular criticisms: most started by declaring that they of course supported equality and equal rights for women, but that perhaps another path would be more conducive to preserving social and family harmony. Opponents fretted 'Lest the Bill may create bitter chasm between brother and sister over the distribution of ancestral property...I am apprehensive about the Bill because I feel that the formulation of such law will certainly create acrimony among brothers and sisters over the distribution of property in family'.³⁸ Opponents reiterated the argument that law(s) cannot change society:

We are formulating laws for the betterment and emancipation of women for hundreds of years...However, all these laws have almost become obsolete and are not effective. Unless there is awareness among people and the laws are implemented in letter and spirit, no one will get justice or rights from the mere formulation of the laws by the Government.³⁹

These objections were embedded in broader statements about the need to educate women about their rights, and better enforce existing legal rights:

today the need of the hour is to educate the women who are our daughter-in-laws [*sic*], daughters and sisters...Once employment is provided to them, there will be no relevance of such Bills and our women will become self-dependent and strong [the] same day and will be able to support themselves.⁴⁰

Yet others argued that the government would have to focus attention on implementation of the law, rather than letting it sit unenforced on the books as a paper tiger. This objection could easily have been applicable to the debates of any time period. Its reappearance in 2006 signalled a critical reflection of the civilising mission in the postcolonial era.

Unlike previous debates, though, the Law Minister in 2006 tackled such prevarications frontally, noting that the much-feared decimation of Hindu society had not come about after the HCB was passed. During the HCB debates, he reminded Members, ‘these kinds of arguments were given that this would create differences amongst brothers and sisters, families would be divided, so would be the society but nothing of the sort has happened. Nobody has changed, brother-sister relation, is still the same’.⁴¹ He held that if opponents did not want to give anything to their daughters, they should just say as much and quit trying to couch their objections in other terms:

several Members raise petty issues and express their apprehension, but do not speak their mind clearly that they do not want to give anything to their daughters. If this is the case, they should say clearly that they do not wish to give anything to the daughter but to the son.⁴²

Bhardwaj countered opponents’ assertions that reform would destroy society by arguing that in fact the failure to reform would destroy society – and that Hindu society, and even classical Hindu texts were fully capable of adaptation and change.⁴³

So the postcolonial debates of the 1940s–1950s and 2006 echoed key religious and gendered characteristics of the British colonial period. Even as they claimed and exercised greater subjectivity in the legislative debates, Hindu women remained an important terrain for the construction not only of Hindu socio-religious tradition, but also of secular modernisation.

But this way of constructing Hindu personal law – and thus Hindus – as modern and progressive works more to articulate a vision or an aspiration – a way to imagine a community – than it does to represent an achieved reality. There are far too many conclusive works documenting the failure to implement reforms to be deluded otherwise.⁴⁴ In such a case, the point becomes not so much to actually implement reforms, as to pursue (and keep pursuing) them. Their meaning becomes aspirational, one of progress and

modernisation as ever-receding horizons that the state must continue to seek and to chase, but which can never be fully attained or realised. It is the seeking, the chasing itself that defines the mandate of the modern(ising), postcolonial Indian state much as the British colonial state legitimated itself in terms of 'civilising'. And both processes, in both periods, have been defined in fundamentally gendered and religious terms.

Thus both the colonial civilising and the postcolonial modernising missions represented something to do and keep doing, rather than a state of being to be attained. This sense was expressed, even if not consciously, in Bhardwaj's assertion that 'reforms – social or economic – must continue; and the Governments of the country do not matter because the interest of the country [and] of the society is involved'.⁴⁵ And again: 'this is not the end of reforms. This will not lead to the emancipation of womanhood in full. We have a lot of work to do to see that she enjoys the status which she deserves in the society'.⁴⁶ The postcolonial Indian state – which by definition can only be a modern state – has to be always progressing, always modernising in order to legitimise itself. As Bhardwaj stated, 'This is a small beginning that we are making. We have to continue with this zeal and see that this is carried to the logical conclusion so that the women are given their due place in the society'.⁴⁷ Where the British colonial state had to civilise to be legitimised, the Indian postcolonial must ever modernise to 'be legitimate'.

Conclusion

How can the shifts and continuities described above be most productively interpreted? One simple approach would be to take them at face value: to argue that the discursive shifts outlined above indicate that religion has become less important in Indian politics and society, while gender equity has become a paramount consideration. Yet this approach is unsatisfactory on each of its axes. Without subscribing to an orientalist construction of India as a deeply religious place/people, it remains untenable to argue that India has become less religious since independence, or that religion is less important in Indian political life. Minimally we can agree that religion has certainly become more politicised over time. But what about women, and women's rights? How did these come to take centre stage in the discourse? And what does it mean that they did?

I have proposed that the roots of this answer trace back to the British civilising mission, so that the evolution of the debates suggests a circular path through the past rather than a linear movement forward. It is widely understood that the civilising mission was the basis of legitimacy of the British colonial state in India, even as the root purpose of colonialism was economic exploitation. The civilising mission was defined in fundamentally gendered terms. The British believed that proof of the unfitness of Indians to

govern themselves was found in the deplorable and oppressed condition of Indian women. British colonial rule – while inherently an economic pursuit – was constructed and legitimised in religious and gendered terms which argued that Indian people were unfit to govern themselves – the evidence of which was to be found in the deplorable condition of their women. And these are the terms against which, and in which, the Indian postcolonial state continues to construct its own legitimacy: now we prove that we are fit to govern ourselves because we improve, or are improving, or seek constantly and continually to improve, the status of our women.

A century and a half after the late nineteenth-century debates on social reforms, women have gained some greater subjecthood, but remain the ground or terrain on which state legitimacy is constructed. As women then embodied tradition and culture and all things past, now women come also to embody progress and modernisation, and all things future. In this way, both state legitimacy and women's rights became ever-receding horizons, always chased but never reached. The chasing itself came to define 'civilising' and now 'modernising;' and the chase took (and takes) place on religious grounds defined in gendered terms.

It is no part of my purpose to suggest or imply that the postcolonial Indian state is just the same as, or no different than, the British colonial state. My purpose, instead, has been to trace some of the critical similarities as well as key differences, and interpret these in ways that resonate with historical understandings and the empirical material of the debates. I have argued that some critical characteristics of the British colonial civilising mission have now come to mark the Indian postcolonial modernising mission: these processes are constructed in fundamentally gendered and religious terms; the processes themselves constitute the goal; and they are meant more for show than for actual substance. This kind of historical understanding is the only way to conceptualise achieving tangible empowerment for Indian women of any religion. Because even as colonialism and postcolonialism mutually constitute each other, colonialism was a project that had an end of sorts. But postcolonialism has no technical end, and there will be no way to understand, grasp, and analyse either one without the other.

Notes

Special thanks to Nikhila Kasibhotla and Elena Marsteller for research assistance. Thanks also to friends and colleagues for comments on earlier drafts, including, but certainly not limited to the faculty in Middle Eastern and South Asian studies at the University of Virginia; and at the University of Cincinnati, Danielle Bessett, Erynn Masi de Casanova, Shailaja Paik, Adrian Parr and Annulla Linders.

1 See e.g., Gerald James Larson (ed.) *Religion and Personal Law in Secular*

- India: A Call to Judgment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Narendra Subramanian, 'Making Family and Nation: Hindu Marriage Law in Early Postcolonial India', *Journal of Asian Studies* 69 (2010), pp. 771–98; Reba Som, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and the Hindu Code: A Victory of Symbol over Substance?' *Modern Asian Studies* 28 (1994), pp. 165–94.
- 2 For one example of comparative analysis across time and religions, see Rina Verma Williams, *Postcolonial Politics and Personal Laws: Colonial Legal Legacies and the Indian State* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).
 - 3 Samuel Huntington, 'The Change to Change: Modernization, Development and Politics', *Comparative Politics* 3 (1971), pp. 283–322.
 - 4 Quoted in John Griffiths, 'What is legal pluralism?', *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 24 (1986), pp. 1–55, here p. 6. Notably, the very process of 'preserving' these family laws effected fundamental transformations in them. Substantively, the colonists' interpretation of the content of the laws was partial or incomplete at best, and flawed at worst. Procedurally, western administration and institutionalisation also altered the laws, not least because they were administered by western judges who inevitably imported their own legal training and conceptions of jurisprudence into their decisions. Elisa Giunchi, 'The Reinvention of Sharī'a under the British Raj: In Search of Authenticity and Certainty', *Journal of Asian Studies* 69 (2010), pp. 1119–42; Michael Anderson, 'Islamic Law and the British Colonial Encounter', in Chibli Mallat and Jane Frances Connors (eds), *Islamic Family Law* (Boston: Graham & Trotman, 1990); J. D. M. Derrett, 'The Administration of Hindu Law under the British', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1961), pp. 10–52.
 - 5 The British originally preserved these indigenous family laws for several reasons. First, they saw family laws as intimately tied to religion; therefore, preserving them accorded with the British colonial policy of neutrality in native religious affairs. Second, they considered it too potentially dangerous to tamper with religion-based family laws, due to the fear of ethnic or communal protest. Finally, scholars have recently argued that the topics encompassed by the personal laws seemed to be of marginal relevance to British economic interests. Concerned primarily with economic extraction, they involved themselves first and foremost with land, labour and criminal laws. Laws relating to family and social life – those that ultimately came to be categorised as the personal laws – were seen as less directly relevant to colonial purposes. This assumption, unsurprisingly, quickly proved to be faulty. See Lauren A. Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); W. J. Mommsen and J. de Moor (eds) *European Expansion and Law: The Encounter of European and Indigenous Law in 19th- and 20th-Century Africa and Asia* (New York: St.

- Martin's Press, 1992); David Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* 15 (1981), pp. 649–721.
- 6 Harold Lewis Levy, 'Indian Modernization by Legislation: The Hindu Code Bill' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Chicago, 1973).
 - 7 Ganganatha Jha, *Council of States Debates* (24 March 1921), 618 (hereafter *CSD*).
 - 8 Ganganatha Jha, *Hindu Law in its Sources*, vol. 1 (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1930), p. v.
 - 9 See e.g., Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009), ch. 5, pp. 199–231.
 - 10 Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313, here p. 296.
 - 11 Subrata Mitra and Alexander Fischer, 'Sacred Laws and the Secular State: An Analytic Narrative of the Controversy Over Personal Laws in India', *India Review* 1 (2002), pp. 99–130.
 - 12 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).
 - 13 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), ch. 6, pp. 116–34.
 - 14 Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
 - 15 Ishita Pande, 'Coming of Age: Law, Sex and Childhood in Late Colonial India', *Gender & History* 24 (2012), pp. 205–30, here, p. 212.
 - 16 J. D. M. Derrett, *Hindu Law, Past and Present* (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee, 1957), p. 57. See also Sir Sultan Ahmed, *Legislative Assembly Debates* (Delhi: Manager of Publications), (24 March 1943), 1408–9 (hereafter *LAD*).
 - 17 This section draws on Williams, *Postcolonial Politics*, ch. 4, pp. 96–124.
 - 18 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
 - 19 Jaswant Singh, *CSD* (15 May 1956), 2207.

- 20 Dr R. K. Mookerji, *CSD* (23 March 1955), 2943.
- 21 Andhra Pradesh was the State of Hyderabad in 1952. Kishen Chand, *LSD* (9 December 1954), 1370.
- 22 E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 23 To some extent, ‘Indian’ and ‘Hindu’ got problematically substituted and substitutable with each other for supporters as much as for opponents. But pro-HCB supporters were more precise: they argued that the HCB would work to unify the Hindu community (first), which would in turn become the foundation for broader national unity – working on the assumption that the unity of the vast majority of the country would pave the way to integrate remaining minorities into the national vision. See Williams, *Postcolonial Politics*, ch. 5, pp. 125–154. But of course, this neglected to grasp that by doing so, the national vision got pre-painted in Hindu hues, which minorities resisted aligning with.
- 24 Notably, however, their arguments were distinctly different before and after the elections. Prior to the first general elections, women political leaders were much more likely to argue that women's rights should be enhanced for the greater good of society as a whole. After the elections and the Congress Party's overwhelming victory, women were able to claim a mandate to carry out the reforms, and advocated the HCB primarily as a matter of gender equity. See e.g., Smt. Sucheta Kripalani, *Constituent Assembly (Legislative) Debates* (24 February 1949), 867–71 (hereafter *CALD*); Smt. Renuka Ray, *CALD* (25 February 1949), 927; Kumari Padmaja Naidu, *CALD* (20 September 1951), 2929–30.
- 25 I continue to search for a reliable citation for this widely-used trope. The closest I have yet come is a quote in an 1882 biography of Mill that refers to his views on China. The author's summary of Mill's argument is: ‘The crowning evidence of the low state of the civilization as a whole is the utterly degraded condition of the women’. Alexander Bain, *James Mill: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882), p. 98.
- 26 B. Gupta, *CSD* (10 March 1954), 2314–5.
- 27 Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947–1964*, vol. 4, ed. G. Parthasarathi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 369.
- 28 Nehru, *Letters*, vol. 4, p. 384. Note the use of the possessive in these formulations (which are fairly common, and not exclusive to this case): women not only constitute the nation, but belong to it in a proprietary sense.
- 29 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *Rajya Sabha Debates* (16

August 2005), 292 (hereafter *RSD*).

- 30 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 109.
- 31 Dr Thokchom Meinya, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 88.
- 32 On the reservation bill, see Vicky Randall, 'Legislative Gender Quotas and Indian Exceptionalism', *Comparative Politics* 39 (2006), pp. 63–82; <<http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/keyword/women-s-reservation-bill>> (accessed 13 May 2011). On the Domestic Violence Act, see <<http://cornellsun.com/section/news/content/2009/03/25/lawyer-tracks-development-domestic-violence-act-india>> (accessed 13 May 2011).
- 33 Smt. Susmita Bauri, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 74.
- 34 Prof. M. Ramadass, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 96.
- 35 Smt. D. Purandeswari, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 70.
- 36 B. Mahtab, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 84.
- 37 Smt. P. N. Durga, *RSD* (16 August 2005), 306.
- 38 Sri Rajaram Pal, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 78.
- 39 Shri Kishan Singh Sangwan, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 90.
- 40 Sri Shailendra Kumar, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 76.
- 41 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 111.
- 42 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 109.
- 43 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 107–8.
- 44 See Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Srimati Basu, 'The Personal and the Political: Indian Women and Inheritance Law', in Larson (ed.), *Religion and Personal Law*; Srimati Basu, *She Comes to Take Her Rights: Indian Women, Property, and Propriety* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).
- 45 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 108.
- 46 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 108.
- 47 H. R. Bhardwaj, Minister for Law and Justice, *LSD* (29 August 2005), 109.

INDEX

Abelove, Henry
able-bodiedness
abortion miracles
abstinence
Áed and Cainnech *vitae*
age
agency
 India
agnosticism
Akroyd, Annette
aldhelm
ambiguous gendering
Ancrene Wisse
androgyny
anthropomorphism
anti-Catholic violence
anticlerical violence
antifeminism
apparitions
architecture of desire
Arnold, John
asceticism
asexuality
assimilation in Mexico
Assyriology
 blood and menstruation

feminist epistemologies
gender studies
Mari case study
purity and impurity
terminology
atheism
Augustine
autobiographies

babalawos
sexuality
Bacchic rites
Bacon, Roger
Baldwin, Deborah
Bamabodhini Patrika
Banerjee, Sasipada
Baptists in Mexico
 Convención Bautista Nacional de México
 memory and martyrdom
 Protestantism and violence
 Protestantism in Oaxaca
 scholarship
 Unión Femenil and the new chapel
barbarism
Beatrice of Nazareth
Beaufort, Margaret
beauty
 male
 somatic
Becker, Marjorie
Becket, Thomas

Bellincioni, Bernardo

Bembo, Pietro

Bengali woman, 'new'

Betancourt, Víctor

Egbe Gèlèdè

Betteridge, Thomas

Bhattacharya-Panda, Nandini

binaries

biographies

India

biopolitics

black madonnas

blood and menstruation

body

eroticisation of

female roles

mutilation of

notions of

body coverings

body politics

Brahmo Samaj

communication with Unitarian women

Unitarian women activists as exemplars for Brahmo women

Bray, Alan

Brigidine *vitae*

Brooks-Hedstrom, Darlene

Brown, David H.

Brown, Peter

brujería

Bugge, John

cabildos de nación

Cabrera, Lydia

Camille, Michael

Campbell, Jane

Campbell, Stephen

cannibalism

Canynges, William

Capellanus, Andreas

capitalism

Carlini, Benedetta

Carpenter, Mary

National Indian Association

caste system

Castiglione, Baldassare

castration

catchphrases

Catholicism

Cuba

Mexico

celibacy

and masculinity

ceremonies, Hindu

Chan Buddhism

Changó

chastity

and masculinity

child marriage

India

Chimm, Sarah

Christian Neoplatonism

Christina Mirabilis

Christological emphasis

Chrysostom, John

church burning

church--state relations

Ciarán of Saigir *vitae*

civilising mission

class, social

Clay, Rotha Mary

clerical masculinity

Coates, Simon

Cobbe, Frances Power

Cocks, Harry

codification

Collet, Sophia Dobson

colonialism

Cuba

India

communalism

communities

Buddhism

creole

deaf

global

Hindu

Jewish

migrant

Muslim

political forces

Quaker

conception of religion, politics and gender

Condren, Mary

confessional

conversion

Mexico

Coon, Lynda

Correggio, Niccolò da

creole communities

cross-cultural encounters

India

crucifixion

cruciform squint

Cruz García, Elvira

Cuba

Egbe Gèlèdè

Ocha-Ifá

Ocha-Ifá

witches and warlocks

cults

medieval saints

thuggee

cuneiform texts

de Montes, Esther G.

de Oignes, Marie

de Troyes, Chrétien

deafness in the nineteenth-century

deaf and dumb

death-mute's faith

irreligion

Debi, Swarnakumari

de-Christianisation

Defoe, Daniel

Delgado, Raquel A.

desire

diasporic identities

disability

discourses

China

colonial

cross-cultural

gender

modernity

racial

religious

scientific

divination

Doe, Tanis

domestic duties in India

domestic violence in Mexico

dynastic biographies

Dyson, Esther

education

for girls

Egbe Gèlèdè

eiulatio

Elliott, Dyan

embodiment

equity

ethnicity

Cuba

Mexico

Euripides

Evangelical revival
evangelicalism
evolutionary biology
extramarital sex

faith practices and identities
family life
 China
 India

fanaticism

fascism

Febles Padrón, Miguel

female gaze in medieval English anchorhood
 architecture of desire
 dangers of sight
 mechanics of medieval sight
 redeeming sight

female infanticide

feminisation of religion

femininity

 India

feminism

 India

feminist epistemology

festivals, Hindu

Ficino, Marsilio

Filelfo, Francesco

Finucane, Ronald

Foucault, Michel

freethinking

Fregoso, Antonio Fileremo

Freud, Sigmund

friendship

fundamentalism

Ganguly, Kadambini

gaze, female

architecture of desire

dangers of sight

mechanics of medieval sight

redeeming sight

gender and doctrine in religious violence

gender roles

Cuba

gender, deafness and Protestantism

deaf-mute's faith

gendering irreligion

heathens

genealogy

Georgianna, Linda

gesticulation, violent

Gilchrist, Roberta

Giles, Kate

God as Word

goddess worship

government

Cuba

Greece, history of a slogan

Greek Tragedy

grief

public displays

Grosseteste, Robert

Grosz, Elizabeth
Guide for Anchoresses

hagiography

Hall, Stuart

Hallström, Björn

harem texts

healing

heathenism

 deafness

Heist, William W.

Hempton, David

heterodox spirituality

heterodoxy

heteronormativity

heterosexuality

 Cuba

 military culture

hierophany

Hinduism

 femininity and victimhood

 masculinity and violence

historical agency

history of the body

Holy Maidenhood

Holy Week

homoeroticism

homophobia

homosexuality

 Cuba

 James VI of Scotland

Middle Ages

military culture

Hopper, Sarah

Howe, Julia Ward

human sovereignty

humanism

hygiene of the soul

hysteria

iconoclasm

Spain

iconography

identity

feminine

ideology

China

Greece

Mexico

image and viewer

imagery

imageros

immigration

impurity

terminology

incarnation

Spain

India's Hindu Laws

1920s debates

1940s and 1950s debates

2006 debates

indigenous communities in Mexico

infanticide

infanticide, female

initiation

innovation

insanity

interactions

interdenominational conflict

interference

intersectionality

architectural and gender analysis

faith traditions

masculinity

Irish hagiography

Áed and Cainnech *vitae*

Brigidine *vitae*

Ciarán of Saigir *vitae*

miraculous in the motif

irreligion

deafness

gendering

Iyáonifá

iyáwò

James, William

Johnson, Todd E.

Juárez Garcia, Samuel

Judaism and menstruation

Karras, Ruth Mazo

Katz, Jonathan

Kempe, Margery

kinship

Cuba

Kirkby, Margaret

Klages, Mary

Kudlick, Catherine

Lahiri, Radharani

lamentation motifs in Medieval hagiography

cult of saints

late medieval saints

literary inheritance

tropes of maternal mourning

violent gesticulation

wailing

weeping

Lashford, John

Latuán

lay attitudes

Buddhist men

Buddhist women

celibacy

masculinity

Leonardo da Vinci

composite beauty and androgeny

image and viewer

male beauty in Christian thought

male beauty in Neoplatonism in Renaissance Milan

sexuality

youthful beauty

Lewis, Katherine

liberal theology

liberalism in India

liberation theology

libido

Lindberg, David C.

Livermore, Mary A.

Lombard, Peter

Makrakis, Apostolos

male beauty

in Christian thought

Neoplatonism in Renaissance Milan

male prostitutes

Manning, E.A.

Mari letter

Marian devotion

marriage

child

Cuba

Marshall, Paul

martyrdom

Mexico

Spain

masculinity

clerical

Cuba

Hindu

Mexico

Middle Ages

thuggee

masculinity and spirituality in Renaissance Milan

composite beauty and androgeny

image and viewer
male beauty in Christian thought
male beauty in Neoplatonism
sexuality
youthful beauty in Leonardo's thought
masculinity, chastity and celibacy
masculinity, religion and the unpardonable sin
Mass
material world
maternal mourning tropes
Matory, J. Lorand
McNamara, Jo Ann
memories
 collective
 martyrdom
menstruation
Mesopotamia, ancient
 blood and menstruation
 feminist epistemologies
 gender studies
 Mari case study
 purity and impurity
 terminology
mestizos
Metaxis, Ioannis
Methodism
migration
military attitudes to sexuality and masculinity
military culture
miracles
missionary influences

deafness

Mexico

mobility

modernism

modernity

Mexico

monasticism

monks

monogamy

moral panics

morality in India

motherhood in Mexico

murder

Mursell, Gordon

muscular Christianity

muscular Hinduism

muscular Judaism

mysticism

Christian

mythology in Cuba

narratives

China

closure

decline

feminisation of religion

formula

Methodist conversion

right-wing

secularisation

structure

truncated
voice
nationalism
Hindu
Mexico
Neoplatonism
networks in India
new religious politics
non-interference
non-whites in Cuba
Normal School for Girls
nuns
pregnancy

obscurantism
Ocha-Ifá
African roots and Cuban praxis
participation of women
ocular communion
Odú
optics
medieval theory
oracles
orishas
female
same-sex intercourse
Orpen, Charles
Orsi, Robert
Ortiz, Fernando
Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónké

Pacioli, Luca

paganism

 festivals

 rituals

Pallis, Alexandros

paternalism

patriarchy

Pecham, John

penance

Peng Jiqing

 background

 religious syncretism

penitence

Percepts of Jesus

periodisation

 Cuba

personhood

Pettit, Emma

pilgrimage

pilgrimage sites

Plummer, Charles

Poliziano, Angelo

polygamy

popular belief and custom

pornography

possession

 lamentation

orishas

postcolonialism

 India

post-feminism

postsecular perspectives

pregnancy

Mesopotamia

nuns

priesthood

celibacy

chastity

priests/priestesses in Cuba

privacy

progress

Mexico

property rights

prophecy

prostitution

male

Middle Ages

military

Protestant Reformation

psychoanalysis

psychological thought

classification

desire

spirituality

public behaviours

lamentation

visibility of women

Pure Land Buddhism

purity

Cuba

Mesopotamia

terminology

queer studies

rabbinical tradition

Rack, Henry

Rankin, Melinda

rationalism

reform

- gender

- Hindu law

- India

- Muslim

- personal law

- religious

- social

regulation

religion

- cultures and transcultural exchanges

- embodiment and subjectivity

- future perspectives

- gender and political activity

- gender and sexuality

- past perspectives

- present perspectives

religious conversion in Mexico

religious ecstasy

religious liberalism

- woman question

religious practices in Cuba

Religious Right

religious texts

representations

masculinity

repression in Cuba

reproduction

revolution

Cuba

Mexico

right-wing feminism

right-wing movements

rituals

Cuba

Mexico

Rocke, Michael

Roy, Rammohun

Ruggiero, Guido

sacramental theology

sacred spaces

sacred texts, Hindu

sainthood

medieval cults

medieval lives

Samá, Lorenzo

same-sex intercourse

same-sex love

same-sex love in the British Army

masculinity, religion and the unpardonable sin

Methodism and the Staniforth story

military attitudes to sexuality and masculinity

Sampson Staniforth autobiography

same-sex love/acts in Cuba

sati

Schmidt, Leigh Eric

Scribner, Bob

sculptures

seclusion of women

secularisation

secularism

seduction

self-transcendence

Sen, Keshub Chunder

 visit to England

sensory experiences of faith

sex, mysticism and psychology

sexology

sexual ambiguity

sexual encounters

sexual identities

sexual instinct

sexual meanings

sexual neurosis

sexual perversion

sexual politics

sexual revolution

sexual sin

sexuality

 Cuba

 India

Shaen, William

Shannüren shuan

 biography of Madam Li

 biography of Madam Xu

 biography of The Old Woman Who Burned A Lodge

biography of The Wandering Old Women

critical remarks

literary form

narrative in Chan biographies

narrative in Pure Land biographies

Peng Jiqing (editor)

religious syncretism

Sharpe, Richard

Shepard, Alexandra

sight

dangers of

medieval

redeeming

sign language

Sima Qian

sin

sexual

unpardonable

sisterhoods

situational sexuality

Sleeman, William

Sleight, William

slogans

Smith, Lucius C.

socialist feminism

sodomy

somatic beauty

sovereignty in South India

global expansions, gender and religion

global history of sovereignty

immodest proposals

resisting feudal futures

Spanish Civil War

Spearing, A.C.

Spiritual Marriage

spiritual world

spirituality

China

heterodox

India

squint, cruciform

standpoint epistemologies

states

Stoddard Holmes, Martha

Stopes, Marie

‘strong-minded’ woman

superstition

symbols in Cuba

Symons, Arthur

syncretism

China

Mexico

tabernacle

taboos in Cuba

textual authenticity

theology

Christian

third genders

Thomas Aquinas

thuggee

traditions

African
Buddhist
China
Christian
India
Mexico
Muslim
power structures
Protestant
purity
scriptural
thuggee
transcendentalism
transnationalism
Trumbach, Randolph

ugliness
ululation
Underhill, Evelyn
Unión Femenil (Mexico)
Unitarians
 communication with Brahmo women
 women activists as exemplars for Brahmo women
unpardonable sin
Ur III texts

Vauchez, André
Vaughan, Mary Kay
violence
 India
 Mexico

violent gesticulation in lamentation

Virgin Mary

cult of

virginity

Middle Ages

virtues in China

Visconti, Gaspare

visionaries

von Weissenberg, Marita

Wagner, Kim

wailing

Walsh, John

Ward, William

warlocks in Cuba

weeping

Wesley, John

witches in Cuba

woman question

religious liberalism

women's bodies

women's groups

Woodcock, Thomas

word of God

world religions

worship of *orishas*

Yang Qiyuan

Yoruba

youth

male beauty

zenana

WILEY END USER LICENSE AGREEMENT

Go to www.wiley.com/go/eula to access Wiley's ebook EULA.